BUSH'S STATE OF THE UNION STRATEGY Ryan Lizza

THE NEW REPUBLIC

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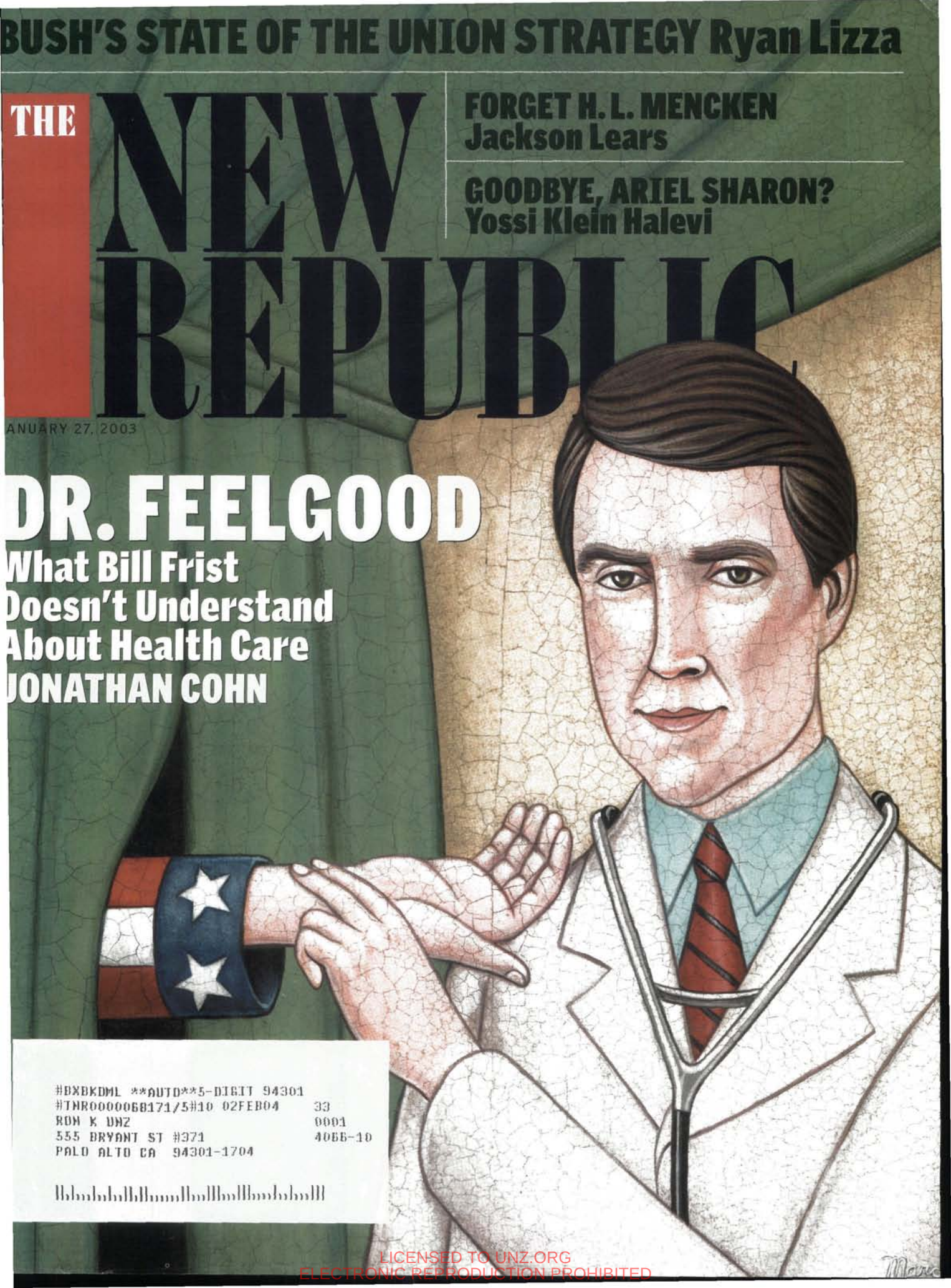
ANUARY 27, 2003

DR. FEELGOOD

What Bill Frist Doesn't Understand About Health Care

JONATHAN COHN



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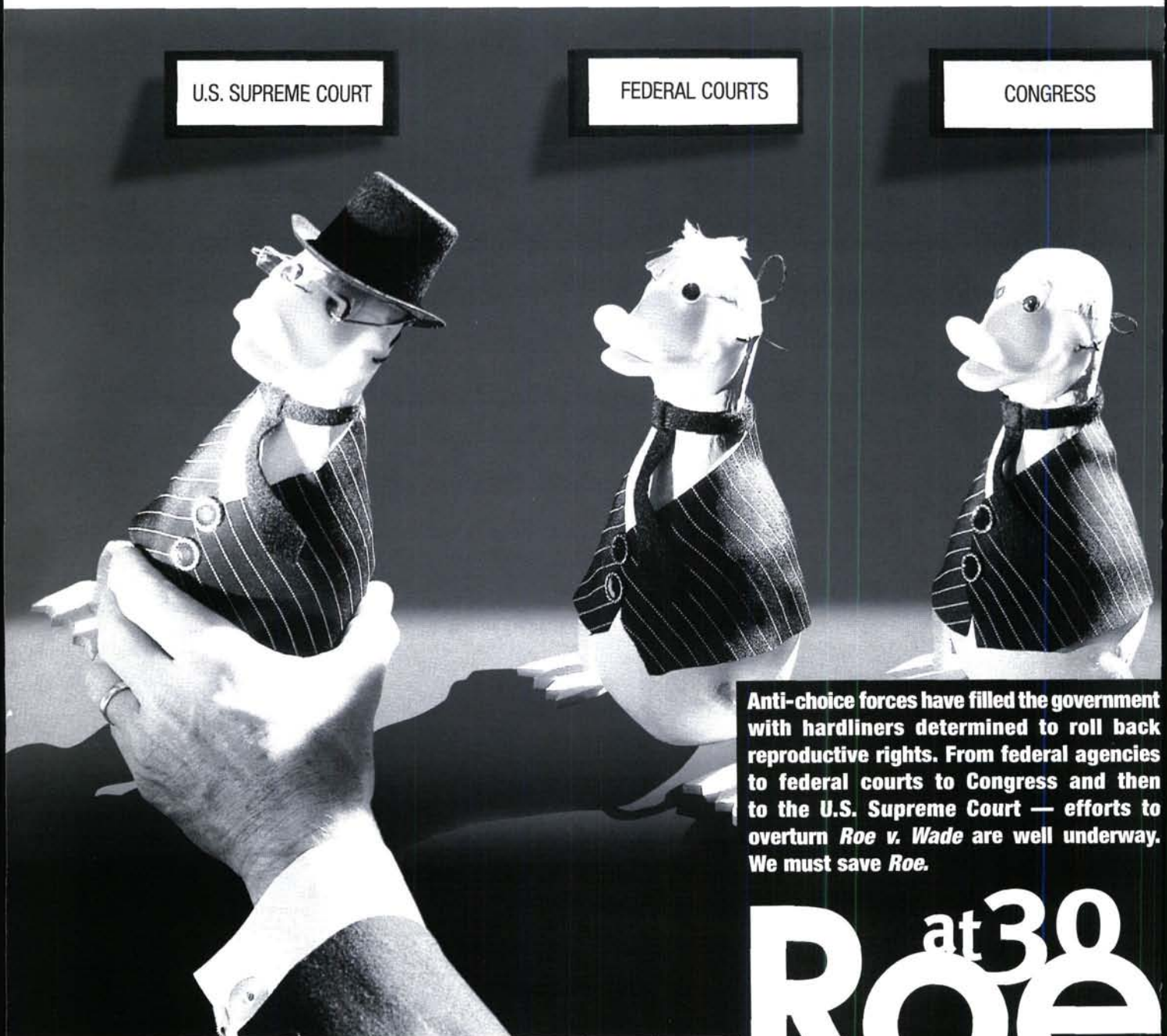
THE ANTI-CHOICE FORCES ARE BUSY GETTING THEIR DUCKS IN A ROW...



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Roe at 30

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A Journal of Politics and the Arts

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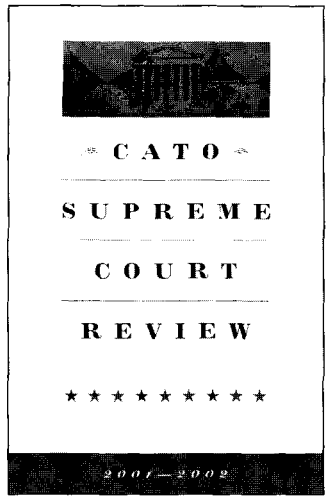

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CORRESPONDENCE

Placebo effect

TO THE EDITORS:
Arnold S. Relman and Marcia Angell are to be applauded for their compelling case against the drug industry's outrageous profit margins; I have no quarrel with any of their points ("America's Other Drug Problem," December 16). Their essay, however, overlooks one major contributor to this problem: the drug consumers' irrational belief in the power of medication. Too often we look to pills to cure health problems that would be most effectively ameliorated by modifications in lifestyle or changes in behavior. Yet our first response when confronted with a medical condition is to ask what can be taken to remedy the situation. And, in so doing, we unwittingly empower the drug industry with our simplistic faith in the power of the pill. We, the consumers, create an inflated market for drugs that sometimes should be the last resort, not the first choice.

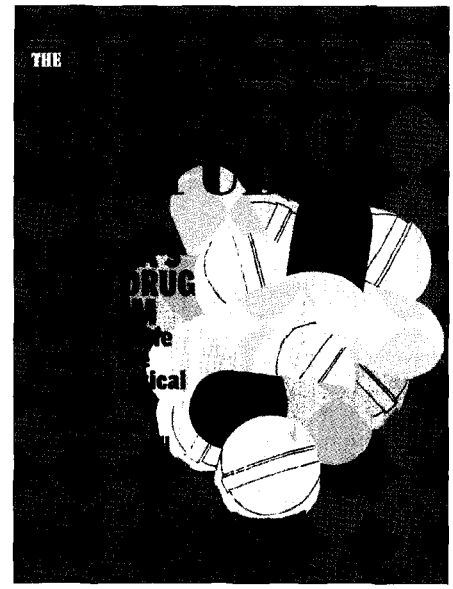
RANDOLPH BLAKE
Nashville, Tennessee

ARNOLD S. RELMAN
AND MARCIA ANGELL REPLY:
Randolph Blake makes a good point, but it must be said that the public's "irrational belief" in the power of drugs is assiduously cultivated by the drug industry's marketing efforts. The industry constantly oversells the virtues of its products.

Medical attention

TO THE EDITORS:
Siddhartha Mukherjee, a resident in internal medicine, asks of medical education, "How did the system evolve to this breaking point?" ("Resident Aliens," November 25). The answer is that not only is it not at a breaking point; it is in point of fact the most widely admired, envied, and desired program in the world. Medical students and patients from everywhere apply to come to the United States for training and for care. The real questions are: Who did this, and why did they perpetrate this change in a system that was working not just well but better than any other? The "who," I guess, is John Conyers Jr., a frightened ACGME (Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education), and a misinformed public. The "why" is complicated, but it is related to jealousy and anger at what is viewed by non-surgeons as macho, arrogant, and demeaning behavior.

The 80-hour workweek hopefully will not interfere with internal-medicine residencies since 80 hours is probably far in excess of present work hours. It will, however, likely destroy the quality of surgical education and interfere profoundly with patient care. "Derek," the neurosurgical resident in Mukherjee's article, should have called the backup, who could have called the senior resident, who could have called the attending. The chain of command is designed to eliminate errors due to fatigue. This past summer in Quebec, parliament passed a law forcing doctors to work longer hours. This anomaly is being repeated in reverse in the United States because central control of supply is never able to predict the demand.



A tragedy of the first magnitude is about to take place in the U.S. health care system. The reason is that Conyers, the ACGME, and the American public think they know how to train surgeons better than surgeons do. In a few years, we too will have to pass new laws to make surgeons work longer hours. The tragic end of U.S. supremacy in surgical education and patient care is in sight.

JOHN A. JANE SR., M.D., PH.D.
David D. Weaver Professor of Neurosurgery
Chairman, Department of Neurological Surgery
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia

TO THE EDITORS:
From the perspective of a number of years in the professor-of-medicine business, I read Mukherjee's article with interest and appreciation. He identifies a true quandary of dedicated individuals regardless of profession, answering the ques-

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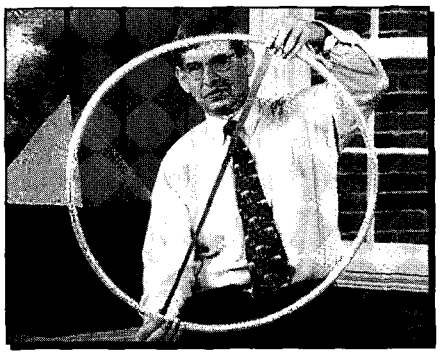

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MICHAEL STARBIRD (Ph.D., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1974) is a Professor of Mathematics and a University Distinguished Teaching Professor at The University of Texas at Austin. He is deeply interested in bringing the intrigue and fascination of mathematics to those who are not necessarily mathematically oriented. The American Mathematical Monthly acclaimed his recent book, *The Heart of Mathematics: An Invitation To Effective Thinking*, co-authored with Edward B. Burger, as possibly the best math book—textbook or not—for non-mathematicians it had ever reviewed!

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

South End

MOST COMMENTATORS aren't much impressed by the Bush administration's North Korea policy. But the Bushies deserve a little slack. First of all, dealing with Pyongyang's weaponized wackos is hard. Second, this administration never called North Korea a foreign policy priority; candidate George W. Bush never claimed it as his special area of expertise.

So what is the president's excuse on Latin America? During the campaign, Bush wielded his Latin America experience to fend off charges that he was unqualified on foreign policy. When a TV reporter stumped him with a quiz on foreign leaders, Bush asked the reporter whether he could name the foreign minister of Mexico. In an August 26, 2000, speech at Florida International University, Bush vowed that, unlike Bill Clinton, "I will look south, not as an afterthought, but as a fundamental commitment to my presidency." This rhetorical outreach probably contributed to Bush's respectable 33 percent share of the Latino vote.

But any Latino—or non-Latino—who supported Bush in 2000 because of his commitment to Latin America must be feeling pretty dumb today. For if Bush really has "look[ed] south" during his two years as president, all he has seen is the tremendous mess his administration has made in the region he supposedly cares about most.

Start with Venezuela, America's fourth-largest oil supplier at a moment when we're reconsidering our relationship with Saudi Arabia and on the verge of war with Iraq. In April 2002, Venezuela's demagogic but democratically elected president, Hugo Chávez, was briefly overthrown. Throughout Latin America, governments condemned the coup. But, to their amazement, the United States—which had spent the 1990s demanding democracy in the Western hemisphere—refused to do the same. On April 12, White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer called for new elections rather than Chávez's reinstatement. Two days later, Condoleezza Rice blamed Chávez for his own overthrow, implying that the United States was happy with the result. When the Organization of American States crafted a resolution denouncing the coup, the Bush administration tried to weaken it. Finally, after Chávez regained power, the White House insisted that it opposed coups. But, as one unnamed Latin American diplomat told the *Los Angeles Times*, "The United States blew it badly. . . . damage has definitely been done."

In fact, the damage was just beginning. Last December, with Chávez's opponents mobilizing a second time, Fleischer once again called for new elections, despite the fact that they are not authorized under the Venezuelan constitution. Latin American leaders looked on in dismay, and the White House again recanted. In the past week, the Bush administration has offered a new policy to defuse the still-growing crisis, but any U.S. policy is now deeply suspect. "This is what happens if you don't have high-level political attention to a situation that needs heavy lifting," Michael Shifter of the Inter-American Dialogue told the *Los Angeles Times* in December.

The Bush administration's policy toward continental giants Argentina and Brazil has been little better. In December 2001, after Argentina's economic collapse left millions of people desperate, angry, and hoping for U.S. help, Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill mused that the country had been "off and on in trouble for seventy years or more. They don't have any export industry to speak of at all. And they like it that way. Nobody forced them to be what they are." When O'Neill visited Buenos Aires, protesters responded by pelting his car with eggs. A poll last fall showed that only 38 percent of Argentines held a positive impression of the United States.

O'Neill wasn't much more popular in Brazil. His suggestion that the country might not deserve further economic aid led to a run on Brazilian currency. And it so enraged then-President Fernando Henrique Cardoso that he refused to meet with O'Neill until the Treasury secretary retracted his words, which he ultimately did. In fact, after accruing enormous Latin American ill will with its initial opposition to International Monetary Fund bailouts, the Bush administration has now reversed course, leading conservative *Financial Times* columnist Amity Shlaes to call U.S. policy "dismayingly inconsistent."

Even Mexico, which Bush has called America's most important bilateral partner, is turning against the administration (see Gretchen Peters, "Crazy like Fox," December 16, 2002). Since September 11, 2001, the White House has torpedoed Vicente Fox's efforts at an immigration deal, although rationalizing movement across the border might actually improve U.S. security. He has reneged on promises to open U.S. markets to Mexican agriculture, and, this summer, he turned down Fox's plea to commute the death sentence of a Mexican national executed in Texas. Furious, the Mexican president cancelled a trip to Texas. This month, his pro-American foreign minister resigned.

The administration touts its moves toward hemispheric free trade. But even these have been halting. Yes, the Bushies struck a free-trade deal with Chile and are negotiating one with the nations of Central America. But Bush's tariffs have virtually barred Brazilian steel from the U.S. market, and the farm bill he signed subsidizes U.S. agriculture at Latin America's expense. In the last two years, the European Union has moved faster to liberalize trade with Latin America than has the United States. "The Bush administration has not delivered to Latin America, especially on trade," John Welch, chief Latin American economist at West LB, told *The New York Times* last December.

In truth, President Bush's Latin America policy has been exactly what he vowed it would not be: an afterthought. The White House has marginalized the position of assistant secretary of state for Latin America, nominating anti-Fidel Castro hard-liners whose main qualification is their ability to harvest votes in South Florida. The result, as one Latin American ambassador told *The Washington Post*, is "nobody with juice who can take things to the White House." Indeed, according to the *Post*, by late December, the National Security Council had still not discussed Venezuela's growing crisis.

And, while the Bush administration looks the other way, anti-Americanism is making a comeback. Left-wingers have won elections in Brazil and Ecuador, and governments across the continent are retreating from free-market economics. In a recent speech, incoming Republican Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Richard Lugar warned the Bushies, "We have to be much more vigorous, hands-on, deeply interested"—echoing the critique Bush leveled at Bill Clinton in 2000.

Perhaps the White House will turn its attention south as 2004 approaches. Then again, if Karl Rove decides on a different strategy to woo Latinos, maybe Bush can finally admit that he has given up on Latin America. Which would make sense—since Latin America has pretty much given up on him.

PETER BEINART

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Hyperactive

IN THE SMALL HOURS of a cold January night in 1994, three young fools chugged vodka in the ironically named rural town of Improve, Mississippi. Once drunk, they built a wooden cross and set it ablaze on the lawn of an interracial couple, Earnest and Brenda Polkey. The FBI soon arrested the three men and tried them before a U.S. District Court judge named Charles Pickering.

Now that President Bush, undaunted by the racial immolation of Trent Lott, has renominated Judge Pickering to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, that trial—in which Pickering fought strenuously to reduce the sentence of one convicted cross-burner—has again become Exhibit A in the Democrats' case that Pickering and his GOP patrons are Lott-style closet segregationists. "To renominate Judge Pickering," New York Senator Charles E. Schumer said last week, "shows, unfortunately, that Richard Nixon's Southern strategy is still alive and well in the White House."

Not exactly. The real problem with Pickering isn't that he's a racist. (The strong support for him among black Mississippians offers pretty compelling evidence that he's not.) The problem, rather, is that Pickering is a shoddy judge, willing to take extreme measures to get around laws with which he disagrees. Republicans would never stand for such behavior in a liberal nominee. Democrats should not tolerate it with Pickering.

The cross-burning case is instructive here. Two of the three defendants cut plea bargains with federal prosecutors that allowed them to avoid prison. The third, 20-year-old Daniel Swan, was offered a plea that would have sent him to prison for 18 months. (The others were offered more lenient deals for good reason: One was a 17-year-old juvenile, and the other was borderline mentally retarded.) Instead, Swan took his chances with the jury. He lost. Under federal mandatory sentencing guidelines, his conviction brought a prison sentence of seven and a half years: two and a half years for racial intimidation and five years for using fire in a federal felony—a sentence designed specifically with cross-burners in mind.

That Swan should face more than seven years while his accomplices went free appalled Pickering. He called it "the worst case of disparate sentencing" he had ever seen as a judge and set to work trying to have it reduced. He hectored federal prosecutors in private meetings, bizarrely ordering them to discuss the case personally with the U.S. attorney general. He threatened to order a new trial. And, on the eve of Swan's sentencing, Pickering even called an old friend at the Justice Department and complained about the sentencing disparity. Several legal ethicists have said Pickering's behavior—acting less as an impartial arbiter of the law and more as advocate for the defendant—was inappropriate at best, unethical at worst. In particular, the call to his friend may well have been a forbidden ex parte communication, meaning one without all parties to the case present. "Whatever Pickering's motives may have been, this was no way for a judge to behave," John Lebensdorf of Rutgers University wrote in a letter to Senator John Edwards. Ultimately, the prosecution, fearing that Pickering might throw out the verdict entirely, dropped the arson charge. Swan wound up with 27 months in prison.

Throughout the case, Pickering complained about taking orders from "Washington." One of the Justice Department prosecutors later wrote in a memo that Pickering "did not like being told what he *had* to do" and that he complained that "Washington was behind the effort" to sentence Swan to seven years. But of course "Washington" was behind the effort; "Washington" writes federal law! Court transcripts show Pickering's unwillingness to accept that constitutional state of affairs. "Congress," he argued at one hearing, "sometimes [is] out of touch with the reality in the real world." Later he complained that Congress often "reach[es] decisions that are completely illogical and completely out of touch." Surely Republicans would never stand for a liberal judge who made similar complaints in the context of, say, harsh mandatory sentences for possession of crack cocaine.

The cross-burning case is just the most flagrant example of Pickering's dubious performance as a judge. He has been reversed by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals (the one on which Bush wants to place him) 26 times, 15 of them for violating "well-settled principles of law"—an embarrassing rebuke in which the higher court finds the answer so obvious it doesn't even bother to publish its opinion. (By contrast, the last judge Bush named to the Fifth Circuit, Edith Brown Clement, had not one such reversal.) No, Pickering is not a racist. But he is a judicial activist who disregards both the letter and intent of the law when he doesn't agree with it. And, as such, Democrats have no reason to confirm him. ■

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NOTEBOOK

GENERAL OPINION: Retired General Wesley Clark has all the makings of the Democrats' dream presidential candidate: West Point graduate, Rhodes scholar, Vietnam veteran, the supreme allied commander who led the 1999 NATO campaign in Kosovo and Serbia. There's just one problem: Very few voters know who he is. But that might not be a problem for much longer. Clark is a commentator on military and international affairs for CNN. He currently appears on the news network about twice a week, but, should the United States go to war in Iraq, his airtime will greatly increase—and, unlike any of the other Democratic presidential hopefuls at this point, Clark will become a regular presence in voters' living rooms. Clark has not formally declared that he is a presidential candidate (he does not even have an official party affiliation at this point), but he certainly is acting like one: He campaigned for Democratic congressional candidates in New Hampshire last year, his associates have been reaching out to Democratic insiders and party activists in Iowa, and he is in the midst of a "dialogue tour" that has had him giving speeches around the United States for the past several months. Still, because Clark is not a declared candidate, his CNN gig does not run afoul of the Federal Communications Commission's "equal time" guidelines, which require media outlets to give political candidates roughly the same amount of coverage and exposure. "We would not have any political candidate on air except to comment about politics or a particular race, and the person would be clearly identified as a candidate," a CNN spokeswoman recently told *The New York Sun*'s Ben Smith, who first noted the unfair advantage Clark derives from his TV work. CNN is right: Clark is technically not a candidate. But, as Clark himself told the *Sun* about his CNN contract, "There are some very strict guidelines on it. It's just common sense that if you become a declared candidate, or if you take political money or become overtly political, you've got to give up your CNN contract." We say it's common sense that Clark has already become overtly political.

KERRY GETS HIS MONEY'S WORTH: While we're on the subject of media-political conflicts of interest, let's look at the case of Douglas Brinkley. The handsome, 41-year-old celebrity historian is a man of many hats, having written, co-written, or edited more than a dozen books in the last decade; published articles in *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* (among others); and still found the time to appear frequently as a talking head—oops, "presidential historian"—on CNN, Fox, MSNBC, and National Public Radio. Brinkley's latest project is an authorized biography of Senator John Kerry's experience in Vietnam, titled *Tour of Duty* and due out this fall. As *The Boston Globe* pointed out when the book was announced in November, "It's a bit of a risk for both parties. Brinkley knows Kerry wants a book that'll make him look good in the 2004 presidential campaign. But Brinkley has a reputation to protect. He's a history professor at the University of New Orleans and director of its Eisenhower Center." For our part, we're less concerned about Brinkley's reputation as an academic historian and more concerned about his ongoing presence as a TV pundit. As recently as January 3, Brinkley appeared on MSNBC's "Hardball" to enthuse about his new partner-in-biography: "I do think the Democrats have some key people that are going to emerge, and I think Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts is somebody who, if he can present himself as the Vietnam War hero, somebody with three Purple Hearts, somebody who sits on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and somebody that we would trust with issues of homeland security and foreign affairs. I think he's a very, very strong candidate, if the economy is not doing well." A couple of weeks later, Brinkley was on "Hardball" again, this time to talk about the difficulties Senator Joe Lieberman will face in his presidential campaign as the V.P. nominee on a losing ticket in 2000: "No, it's a very hard dog to hunt, as they say. ... I think it's a very hard road for Lieberman." Coming soon to a talk show near you: Presidential historian Douglas Brinkley on why Howard Dean is too lefty, Dick Gephardt is too boring, and John Edwards just doesn't have the experience.

FAT CHANCE: Just days after our cover story on the dubious science supporting the idea that being fat—as opposed to, say, eating badly or being sedentary—is a health risk (see Paul Campos, "Weighting Game," January 13), the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) made headlines with yet another study claiming to demonstrate that "[o]besity appears to lessen life expectancy markedly, especially among younger adults." But, as with previous studies—including a 1999 JAMA article by the same author that purported to show that obesity kills 300,000 Americans per year—this one falls apart on closer inspection. The new study fails to control for fitness, physical activity, diet, dieting history, weight fluctuation, use of weight-loss drugs, and access to medical care—any and all of which could be responsible for the heightened mortality rates. More striking still, even if one ignores these omissions, the authors' data only tenuously supports their conclusion. For example, the increased risk associated with being underweight was equal to or greater than the risks associated with all but the highest levels of obesity. Moreover, the optimum weight for African Americans in the study included the entire "overweight" range; for black women, mortality did not increase significantly until a body mass index (BMI) figure of 37 was reached. (A five-foot-five-inch woman with a BMI of 37 weighs 223 pounds.) One possible explanation for this finding is that, since studies indicate that black women have much more positive body images than white women, they may be far less likely to diet, take diet drugs, and undergo the sorts of large weight fluctuations that have been shown to be highly detrimental to health. But far be it for JAMA to consider such a possibility. The author of an editorial accompanying the study cautioned that "it would be a great disservice to blacks if these results were used to promul-

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gate the concept that excess weight is not harmful to them." In other words, don't let the facts get in the way of our preordained conclusion.

EXCEPTIONAL: Gretta Duisenberg is a perfervid supporter of the Palestinian cause. In this respect, she is merely a typical European. Except that she is not typical: Her husband is the head of the European Central Bank, and so she speaks as an extension of her husband's voice. He, in any case, has said that he backs her 100 percent. The other thing that makes her unusual, even in the context of European rage against Israel, is that she has pushed her anti-Israeli aspersions beyond a certain moral limit. She has not only compared Israel to the Nazis; she has said that Israel is worse than the Nazis. She has done this on several occasions, at home and, more recently, on a pilgrimage to see Yasir Arafat in Ramallah. There is, after all, a particular frisson to comparing the Jews to Hitler's willing executioners: The equation furnishes instant relief to the European conscience. Duisenberg likes to assert that the Nazis did nothing such as blowing up the houses of terrorists, which the Israelis have done in the disputed territories since the grisly intifada began two and a half years ago. It may be true that the Nazis did not blow up Jewish houses. But there were no Dutch Jewish terrorists. In any case, the Nazis blew up Jews. And it would have been a shame to blow up Jewish houses because there were so many Dutch people who were eager to move into them, and did. "With the exception of the Holocaust," Duisenberg instructed last week, the Israeli occupation is more brutal than was the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. With the exception of the Holocaust! Citizens of the Netherlands, particularly those who want to use history as polemic, ought to be rather circumspect when making comparisons to the Nazis. The history of the Second World War does not exactly flatter Holland. Aside from some truly courageous acts of defiance in both Catholic and Protestant churches and some spasmodic strikes by trade unions and university students, mostly early on, the Dutch people as a whole did virtually nothing to save Holland's Jews, who had been a welcome community in the country since the fifteenth century. In fact, the Dutch turned out to be Hitler's willing accomplices in the Nazification of their country and in the destruction of their country's Jewish population. According to *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*, edited by Walter Laqueur and published by the Yale University Press, there were 140,000 Jews in the country at the beginning of the German occupation, and 5,450 Jews returned at the end of the war. (Others left the country or were spared as a result of their mixed marriages.) All in all, nearly 80 percent of the country's Jews were destroyed—the highest percentage of any occupied country in Western Europe. Then again, with the exception of the Holocaust, Duisenberg's forefathers treated Dutch Jews quite well. ■

INSIDE THE BOX | Bruce Reed

MAGINOT LINE

Allies ask Bush to delay Iraq war a few months. France to U.S.: "If we wait long enough, we'll catch Saddam with lots of weapons!"

REMEMBER LOS ALAMOS

North Korea sends envoy to New Mexico: "Forget Bill Richardson. We just wanted to see the first state that developed nuclear weapons."

SILENT TYPE

Clarence Thomas defends new seven-figure book deal: "Justices should be paid, not heard."

UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS

White House says Bush stimulus plan will create one million jobs by 2004: "And that's just counting servants!"

BUDGET BATTLE

Bush accuses Democrats of class warfare: "They always want to divide. I don't even think we should add and subtract."

BREAKING UP

Steve Case leaves AOL-Time Warner but defends deal's synergy: "Neither company could have lost this much on its own."

IT TAKES A THIEF

At first meeting, corporate oversight board votes to pay selves $452k/year. Agenda for next time: "We'd really understand how boards think if we got options!"

COMMUTER

Scandal-plagued Illinois Governor Ryan empties death row on his way out: "I might need some friends in the joint."

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White House Watch

Budget Crunch

By Ryan Lizza

For Bush administration officials, the recent holiday season was a time of nervous anticipation. President Bush will deliver his State of the Union address to Congress on January 28 and unveil his 2004 budget proposal on February 3. The speech and the budget, the president's two most important expressions of his priorities, take months to prepare, and, for many Bushies in the federal bureaucracy, December was the month they found out whether their financial plans passed muster with the Scrooges at the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB). One top official at the Department of Education describes how dreaded budget bureaucrats at OMB pick apart each request for money like university faculty grilling grad students at their oral exams. Last month, this official was shocked to learn that one of her education funding requests was denied. She thought she had a pretty good justification: "It was a campaign promise!"

That backroom haggling, however, is now mostly complete, and the White House will spend the next few weeks selling the results to the public. OMB Director Mitch Daniels is passing off his handiwork to Karen Hughes. That means another January filled with targeted leaks, Cabinet secretary photo-ops, and presidential radio addresses hyping the choicest morsels of news from the forthcoming budget proposals. The idea is to aggressively advertise relatively small funding increases for popular-sounding programs—usually ones befitting compassionate conservatism—to offset the inevitable attack on Bush for the much larger cuts he will ultimately propose.

The White House has this winter p.r. offensive down to a science. Last January, the administration promoted a bit of happy news from its new budget almost every day, making it sound as if a combination of Ted Kennedy and Dick Morris had written the plan. In one of his first radio addresses of 2002, Bush explained that he was increasing funding for both the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutritional program and Job Corps by millions of dollars. The following week, the White House announced that the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program would get an extra $130 million, foster children would get $60 million in vouchers for college or vocational training, and the impossible-to-oppose Mentoring Children of Prisoners initiative would get millions more. Another radio address called for a billion-dollar increase in Title I funding, which goes to disadvantaged schoolchildren. Low-income legal immigrants would get food stamps; global victims of AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis would get U.S. assistance; brownfields would get cleaned up.

Almost every Cabinet secretary was drafted into the effort. Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Mel Martinez introduced the new American Dream Down Payment Fund. Education Secretary Rod Paige announced a $12 million increase for historically black and Hispanic colleges. Interior Secretary Gale Norton trumpeted increased funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System. The hope was that the media would focus on these trees of funding increases while ignoring the forest of spending cuts and zero growth. (For example, Bush's budget would cut the 32 noneducation accounts—nutrition, health, housing, job training, etc.—targeted to low-income Americans by an average of 4.6 percent.)

The whole process is starting over again. With expensive new tax cuts, a shaky economy, large deficits, and a potential war with Iraq, there is more pressure on Bush than ever to cut or freeze nondefense discretionary spending—and more reason to promote the few budgetary bright spots. So, in his first Saturday radio address of 2003, Bush announced that his new budget will call for a billion-dollar increase in Title I funding (sound familiar?), as well as additional money for federal reading programs. The following Saturday, he took to the airwaves to announce new money to fight corporate fraud. He called for an $842 million budget for the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), a 73 percent increase over the 2002 level, and an extra $25 million for the Justice Department's corporate-crime fighters. On Wednesday, almost exactly a year since the last announcement, the White House called for another increase in the WIC program.

The annual rollout by Cabinet secretaries of bite-sized programs you will never hear about again has also started. Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson this week announced a new $40 million proposal to go after the gambling earnings of deadbeat dads. Look for a steady trickle of announcements like this throughout the administration over the coming days.

This year, however, there is a monkey wrench. The January drip of upbeat budget news is premised on a system in which the dirty work of negotiating the appropriations bills, which synchronizes the budget with reality, comes months later, when few even remember what Bush promised. But, this year, the president will be offering his idealized version of the 2004 budget at the same time that he's in painful negotiations with Congress over the real thing for 2003.

That's because, while fiscal year 2003 officially started in October, Congress still hasn't finished eleven of its 13 spending bills. In the Senate, those eleven bills add up to $395 billion in spending and were passed unanimously before the election by the Democrat-controlled Appropriations Committee. But, after the election, as Senate Republicans returned to the chamber in the majority, an emboldened OMB demanded that Congress limit its overall spending on the eleven remaining bills to $385 billion. GOP leaders in the Senate caved, and this week they began the unpleasant task of cutting the extra $10 billion out of the package.

Normally Congress doesn't do anything in January, so the

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president has the month to himself to suck up media attention with his new proposals. But, thanks to the 2003 budget delays, this year the pre–State of the Union debate won't be about Bush's generous 2004 budget. It will be about his slashing homeland security, job-training, and education funds from *this* year's budget. Thanks to Bush's tightfisted request, Republicans are trying to remove about $1 billion for homeland security, more than $500 million for job training, and $1.5 billion in education funding, including $500 million for Title I—all of which make his 2004 promises look like nothing more than political hot air.

This has given Democrats, already encouraged by the president's softening job-approval ratings, a unique opportunity to scuttle the White House's rollout strategy. The Democratic message is simple: An internal strategy memo for Democratic senators instructs, "Argue Republicans are forcing $10 bn in painful cuts from level passed unanimously by Senate Appropriations Committee at same time pressing for $674 bn in tax cuts." They plan to pair Bush's January p.r. push for his 2004 budget largesse with his 2003 stinginess and attack the president as a hypocrite who slashes programs in one year that he claims to support in the next. After Bush announced his huge new increase for the SEC in the 2004 budget on January 11, Democrats prepared an attack on Republican efforts to cut the SEC's *2003* budget. The strategy memo notes that the restoration of SEC funding "moved up list [of priorities] due to President's Saturday radio address."

Democrats know that Bush still has the biggest megaphone in town, but they are hoping the current budget showdown will throw some sand in the White House's January message machine. They are reminded of one of the great Bushisms from last year: "There's an old saying in Tennessee—I know it's in Texas, probably in Tennessee—that says, fool me once, shame on, shame on you. Fool me—*you can't get fooled again.*" ■

Bogotá Dispatch

Security Risk

By Rachel Van Dongen

Two days before he left office last August, Colombian President Andrés Pastrana was feted at Harry Sasson, a tony restaurant in the heart of this city's trendiest neighborhood. Dining on fusion cuisine on Sasson's patio, Pastrana chatted with the chef. Around him, Bogotá's rich and powerful danced salsa between the tables. Water burbled from the restaurant's rose-petal-adorned fountain, and hearty laughter floated through the bistro.

Rachel Van Dongen is a correspondent for *The Christian Science Monitor* based in Bogotá.

It was an eve of momentous change in this war-torn country. Pastrana and his policy of seeking peace with the leftist guerrilla Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was about to go out of vogue. Incoming President Álvaro Uribe Vélez, praised for his personal austerity and work ethic, was about to launch a major military offensive.

But not much would change in Bogotá. The war between the government, the FARC, and other guerilla groups that has plagued the country for nearly four decades largely plays out beyond the city, which, despite Colombia's awful international reputation, is a pleasant and safe place to live. As a result, Bogotanos often ignore their country's serious problems, a willful denial that creates a massive divide between residents of the capital and other Colombians, fosters regional fragmentation, and—worst of all—helps prolong the country's conflicts.

Large swaths of rural Colombia lack any military or police presence. It is here where the country's guerrilla movements prosper—in poor, rural areas, where their ideology and their promise of a better life appeal to peasants with no alternative other than coca-growing or subsistence-farming. It is in this environment that the FARC has grown from a peasant cooperative called the "Independent Republic of Marquetalia," numbering 1,000 in 1964, to an estimated 18,000 members with 70 fronts that today roam 40 to 60 percent of the country.

Bogotá, by contrast, has been much less affected. The capital is fringed by the Andes, posing a daunting challenge to would-be invaders. Furthermore, its seven million citizens are wealthier and therefore less receptive to the ideological arguments promulgated by the FARC and its smaller ideological cousin, the National Liberation Army (ELN). What's more, residents of Bogotá are simply better protected than the rest of the population. As they become more linked to the drug trade, guerilla groups are sticking to the massive Amazon jungles where cocaine is grown and staying away from the capital, where there are 12,000 policemen—more than twice as many as Colombia's far more dangerous second city, Medellín.

This security has laid the groundwork for the efforts of a pair of creative Bogotá mayors: Antanas Mockus, serving his second nonconsecutive term, and Enrique Peñalosa. Mockus has put a premium on creating a civic spirit among Bogotanos by trying such ideas as government mimes who hand out "thumbs-up" or "thumbs-down" cards to promote good behavior. In his first term, he cut down on alcohol consumption by closing bars at 1 a.m. and asked people to voluntarily turn in weapons in exchange for the equivalent of Christmas gift certificates. After Mockus came Peñalosa, who pushed for a greener Bogotá. Peñalosa built more than 1,000 parks, and the city now has hundreds of miles of bike paths that link poor and rich neighborhoods. "What can a poor family do on a Sunday?" asked Peñalosa. "Go to a public space."

The mayors argue that their programs have been so successful that Bogotanos, who once detested their city, are now beaming with pride. Mockus cites examples of voluntary

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water-rationing as a "beautiful" example of civic pride. The arrival of police to ticket a car parked on the sidewalk, which once would have been jeered, is now applauded. Between 1993 and 2001, murder rates plummeted by 60 percent.

As a result of good governance and civic unity, Bogotá today is a remarkably safe city. With 30 murders for every 100,000 residents, it is statistically safer than other major South American cities, such as Caracas. In fact, it has lower homicide rates than Washington, D.C. And, though the capital is home to 15 percent of the country's population, only 2 to 3 percent of its reported kidnappings take place here.

SOME PRAISE BOGOTÁ residents for their resilience and zest for life, but others see the city's safety as fostering a dangerous indifference toward the rest of the country. Bogotanos do contribute to the war effort in some ways. The recent 1.2 percent war tax levied by the national government on wealthy Colombians fell hard on Bogotanos. But, in other respects, Bogotanos have it easy. Under Colombian law, men can buy their way out of compulsory military service, which the government is proposing to extend to two years, and many Bogotanos use this loophole.

Young Bogotanos in particular seem detached from the war. While their poorer peers are being killed daily 200 miles to the north or south, Bogotá youths dance the night away in hip discos, shouting the lyrics to cheesy Latin pop songs. "My stand is to live without thinking too much about the war," said Pedro Salazar, a 28-year-old Bogotano theater director who studied at Brown and then in France.

Politicos like Leon Valencia, a former ELN commander and now a political analyst, argue that this indifference has prolonged the 39-year conflict. In the sophisticated and well-protected capital, far-off provinces have long been ignored by policymakers, who pay little heed as militia movements in the hinterlands recruit members. Representing 25 percent of its gross domestic product, Bogotanos have the influence to demand an end to the conflict, yet they do not. For four years, Pastrana and the FARC engaged in a fruitless dance for peace that only produced more kidnappings and violence; yet few Bogotanos pushed for changes. Even after the FARC killed 117 civilians in an attack last May, there were no massive Bogotá middle-class protests similar to the ones currently seen on the streets of Caracas. So the conflict continued, leading to the election of hard-liner Uribe—and the escalation of warfare.

But perhaps a more serious long-term effect of Colombia's civil war is the threat of regional fragmentation. Colombia is broken up into 32 departments, the country's equivalent of states, and they are becoming so frustrated with Bogotano indifference and the central government's lack of success against insurgent groups that they are pursuing their own solutions. For departments like Arauca, along the Venezuelan border, priorities are simply different than those in the capital. In Bogotá, for instance, one major debate these days is whether the residents are overtaxed. In Arauca, by contrast, there were more than 300 homicides last year, and nearly 200 mayors across the country were threatened with death by the FARC last June. Consequently, several departments want to initiate their own peace talks with rebel groups, though this has not been sanctioned by the national government.

Since Uribe took office on August 7, Bogotanos have been forced to take more notice of the war. His inauguration was heralded with a wave of rockets that killed 21 people in the city's poorest neighborhood. Since then, there have been hit-and-run incidents of urban terror, mostly targeted at police and military buildings.

But life goes on as normal in Bogotá, while Uribe, with the highest approval ratings of any president in the last decade just 100 days into office, wages a major military offensive with some success in the more violent areas. Though many Colombians look for a one-way ticket out of the country, Salazar, the 28-year-old theater director, had that ticket out and decided to return to Bogotá. He has received a grant from the city to direct his latest play, *Death of an Anarchist*. In return, he must perform the play at public libraries. "There are so many stories to explore here aside from guns and knives," Salazar said. "Bogotá is a city full of stories." ■

The GOP caves to the chemical lobby.

Poison

By JOHN B. JUDIS

NEXT TO NUCLEAR facilities, chemical plants pose the greatest danger in the case of a terrorist attack. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified 123 facilities where an attack could injure or kill more than one million people and 750 other facilities where more than 100,000 people would be threatened. A refinery near Philadelphia, for instance, has 400,000 pounds of hydrogen fluoride on hand, which, if released into the air, can cause blindness; kidney, liver, or lung damage; and even death. Terrorists know this. In the spring of 2001, a pilot landed a single-engine Cessna at the airport at Copperhill, Tennessee, and asked a local businessman what type of chemicals were stored at the nearby Boliden Intertrade chemical plant. After September 11, the businessman recognized the pilot as Mohammed Atta.

Many of these chemical facilities are not well-guarded. In a study last year of 60 chemical plants in Baltimore, Chicago, Houston, and Pittsburgh, the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* found that an intruder would have "unfettered access to sensitive control rooms, train derailing levers, pipelines, wharves, tanker trucks and vats holding some of the deadliest poisons ever invented." And, at Senate hearings last July, Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge admitted, "We know that there have been reports validated about security defi-

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ciencies at dozens and dozens of [chemical facilities]."

By this logic, the government should be imposing the same strict anti-terrorist regulations on the chemical industry that it imposed on the nuclear, water-treatment, and airline industries. But it's not. In October 2001, New Jersey Senator Jon Corzine introduced legislation to protect chemical plants, and it seemed likely to pass. But, with the White House's tacit consent, the chemical industry convinced pliant Senate Republicans to block new regulations. It's another instance of the enormous power that business lobbies wield over Republican politicians—and it mocks the GOP's claim that national security is its highest priority.

THE LEGISLATION CORZINE introduced was the Chemical Security Act, designed to protect chemical facilities. The bill, according to an accompanying fact sheet, would have required the EPA and the new Department of Homeland Security to "establish minimum requirements for the improvement of security and the reduction of potential hazards at chemical plants and other industrial facilities that store large quantities of hazardous materials." Chemical plants would be required to meet these standards either through new technology or through security measures.

When some Republicans on the Environment and Public Works Committee objected, Corzine negotiated changes to win their support. For instance, he limited the plants that would fall under the new legislation to those the EPA already lists under its Risk Management Program, which monitors large chemical facilities for industrial accidents. To appease the industry critics who complained that chemical companies would have no incentive to initiate new safety procedures until the EPA completed its standards, Corzine added a provision granting exemptions to firms that took immediate steps. And he met Republican and industry objections that the bill would make companies more vulnerable to attack by forcing them to publicize their risk assessments: His revised bill adopted the secrecy provisions of the bioterrorism bill that Congress passed, even exempting risk assessments from Freedom of Information Act requests. On July 25, the committee passed the bill 19 to zero. Full Senate passage seemed assured.

But the chemical industry fought back vigorously, mounting daily assaults on the Republican members of the committee throughout August. The American Chemistry Council, the principal lobby for the chemical industry, created a formidable coalition of industries that included those directly affected, such as oil and petrochemicals, and the larger business lobbies, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Grover Norquist's network of activist organizations. The legislation focused specifically on chemical facilities near large population centers, but the lobby recruited the American Farm Bureau on the grounds that farmers, who use ammonia-laced fertilizer, would be subject to new regulations. The lobby sounded the usual anti-regulatory alarms. But, in their ads and letters, they also attacked the bill for failing to deal with exactly those issues that Corzine had addressed during negotiations, charging, for instance, that companies would be forced to provide information that could be used "by terrorists and criminals."

Despite these deceptions, the lobby had reason to believe that committee members would listen: In last year's election, four Republican members of the committee—James Inhofe of Oklahoma, Robert Smith of New Hampshire, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, and George Voinovich of Ohio—topped the industry's recipient list for incumbents; in the 1998 cycle, Voinovich and fellow committee member Missouri Senator Christopher "Kit" Bond had topped the list. And so, on September 10, 2002, seven of the nine Republicans on the committee—all of whom had voted *for* the legislation in committee—wrote a letter to their colleagues denouncing Corzine's bill. Led by Bond and Inhofe and mimicking the chemical industry's charges, they claimed the legislation "severely misses the mark," criticizing it for including features Corzine had cut out in his effort to satisfy them. Corzine offered to modify the bill even further, but the Republicans didn't want to change the bill; they wanted to kill it. Aided by the Senate's Byzantine parliamentary rules, they succeeded, blocking a vote on it as an amendment to the Homeland Security Act. The National Petrochemical and Refiners Association crowed on its website last fall, "Due to strong lobbying efforts by the chemical, petroleum and other industries, it appears that the Chemical Security Act of 2002 (the Corzine bill) has been de-railed for the current Congress."

Within the Bush administration, Ridge and EPA Administrator Christie Todd Whitman made no secret of their support for new anti-terrorist regulations for the chemical industry. Whitman even claimed last summer that she could adopt regulations under the existing authority of the Clean Air Act without congressional legislation, but the Justice and Labor Departments both protested the expansion of the EPA's authority, and the White House sided with them. In October, Ridge and Whitman, in response to a *Washington Post* article describing administration inaction, wrote a letter to the editor supporting regulation. "We applaud voluntary efforts some in the industry have undertaken, but ... [v]oluntary efforts alone are not sufficient to provide the level of assurance Americans deserve." Yet, with the White House refusing to buck the industry and its Senate allies, their words were to no avail.

Corzine is not giving up, and he has reintroduced his chemical security bill. But he is now part of the Senate minority and cannot hope to get his legislation considered without substantial Republican support. And the chairmanship of the Environment and Public Works Committee has shifted since the elections, from Vermont Senator Jim Jeffords to none other than James Inhofe. Inhofe says a new bill on chemical security is a high priority in his committee, and one of his committee staffers told me, "We are definitely going to move quickly." But, when I asked the staffer whether the bill would include required standards, he admitted that he had no idea. Perhaps Inhofe and his staff are waiting for the American Chemistry Council's draft. ■

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Jerusalem Dispatch

Loan Ranger

By Yossi Klein Halevi

In the campaign headquarters of the Sephardi party Shas, there is the quiet excitement of people who believe they are witnessing a miracle. Until a few weeks ago, Shas seemed poised to lose more than half of its 17 Knesset seats and cede its place as Israel's third-largest party to its archrival, ultra-secular Shinui. Most of its disillusioned voters had drifted to the Likud Party, not only for love of Ariel Sharon but for antipathy toward Shas, which had thrown out its hero, former party Chairman Aryeh Deri—who had dared to become more popular than Shas's spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef. The anomaly of Shas—an ultra-Orthodox party with a vast non-Orthodox constituency, a movement that advocates Sephardi pride while mimicking the Judaism of Eastern Europe—finally seemed about to unravel.

Now, though, disgusted voters are fleeing Likud and returning "home," as Shas activists put it. Revelations of the Likud's apparent corruption over the past three months have hit voters especially hard. In the Likud primaries last November, alleged vote-buying resulted in unknown candidates winning safe party-list seats ahead of established politicians like Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert. Israelis have been outraged to discover that the Likud, which hoped to inherit the Labor Party's former role as the uncontested party of government, had allowed figures with supposed mob connections to use the vote-buying to manipulate its politics during a time of national emergency. Then came revelations of an improper $1.5 million loan to Sharon's sons from a family friend. Polls began to say Shas could win up to 13 seats. The wise guys in jauntily angled black yarmulkes who hang around the Shas office joke about taking 40 seats.

"It's an act of God," says an activist named Meir. Until recently, Shas's campaign was moribund. But now Meir's cell phone doesn't stop ringing with requests for rallies. "You remember when Sharon threw out Shas from the government and refused to see Rabbi Ovadiah?" Meir says. "Sharon humiliated the honor of the Torah. Now, it's Sharon who is being humiliated. God doesn't forget." I ask Meir why voters disillusioned with Likud's corruption would choose the scandal-ridden Shas. "Our people aren't voting for the Knesset wheeler-dealers," he acknowledges, "but for Rabbi Ovadiah."

In the office of Party Chairman and Interior Minister Eli Yishai hang two giant identical posters of Yosef; Yishai won't repeat Deri's mistake of usurping the rabbi's popularity. I ask Yishai about the reasons for Shas's unexpected revival, and he offers Shas's apocalyptic xenophobia, which centers on non-Jewish Russian immigrants. "People are afraid of Shinui," Yishai says. "A lot of goyim—Russians—are voting for Shinui. People are afraid that Sharon will form a secular government with Shinui. If that happens, this country will stop being a Jewish state, and Israel won't be able to survive."

A few blocks away from Shas headquarters is the Machaneh Yehudah market, which, in past elections, Sephardi vendors transformed into Likud's emotional capital. Yet, two weeks before this year's vote, there are no posters of Sharon visible. "Do you know what used to happen here before an election?" says Boaz Tsidkiyahu, one of the market's leading Likudniks. "Shouting, arguments, wall-to-wall Likud posters. Now? No one has any fire left. People are tired by the situation in the country and in the party."

For all the ambivalence, a pro-Sharon backlash is stirring. The decision last week by Supreme Court Justice Mishael Cheshin to halt the broadcast of Sharon's press conference—which Sharon called to answer corruption charges but that Cheshin said violated electioneering laws—outraged even disaffected Likudniks. Polls taken after the incident showed the Likud's popularity rising slightly. "I'd decided not to vote at all," says one Machane Yehudah vendor, a longtime Likud supporter. "But, after what they did to Sharon, I'm going back to the Likud. In what country do they treat a prime minister like this?" Once again, he implies, "they"—the Ashkenazi left who control the media and the courts—are humiliating "us."

The election has become a contest between the shame Likudniks feel toward their party and the anger they feel toward outsiders trying to undermine it. "Sure I'm ashamed about what's happened in the Likud," says another vendor, but, "in Labor, the corruption is just as bad, and the media ignores it. ... Everyone is trying to bring down Sharon. ... [Tony] Blair invites [Labor candidate for prime minister Amram] Mitzna to London. [Yasir] Arafat announces he's ending terrorism until after the elections, not to hurt the left. Afterward, they can kill as many Jews as they want."

Likudnik grievances toward the Israeli media are not unwarranted. Amnon Dankner, editor-in-chief of the daily *Ma'ariv* and no Likud supporter, recently wrote, "It's hard not to understand Likud voters who see how serious incidents that occur in their party are given sensational criminal proportions, while no less serious incidents in the rival party are downplayed. ... In the election campaign of '99, which Ehud Barak won, there were several serious events that were drastically underplayed in the press"—events like Barak's illegal campaign financing.

Yet not even a loyal press has been sufficient to save Labor from itself. In the midst of the worst government scandal since Yitzhak Rabin's fall from power in 1977, the opposition has been unable to present itself as a worthy alternative. One veteran Israeli journalist, sent to cover Mitzna, told me he asked to be relieved of the assignment. "Mitzna doesn't deliver campaign speeches but lectures," he says. Indeed, the very fact that Labor's candidate is the mayor of a second-rate city with no Cabinet experience reveals the stunning decline of Israel's former party of government.

Likud's moral suicide is offset by Labor's ideological suicide.

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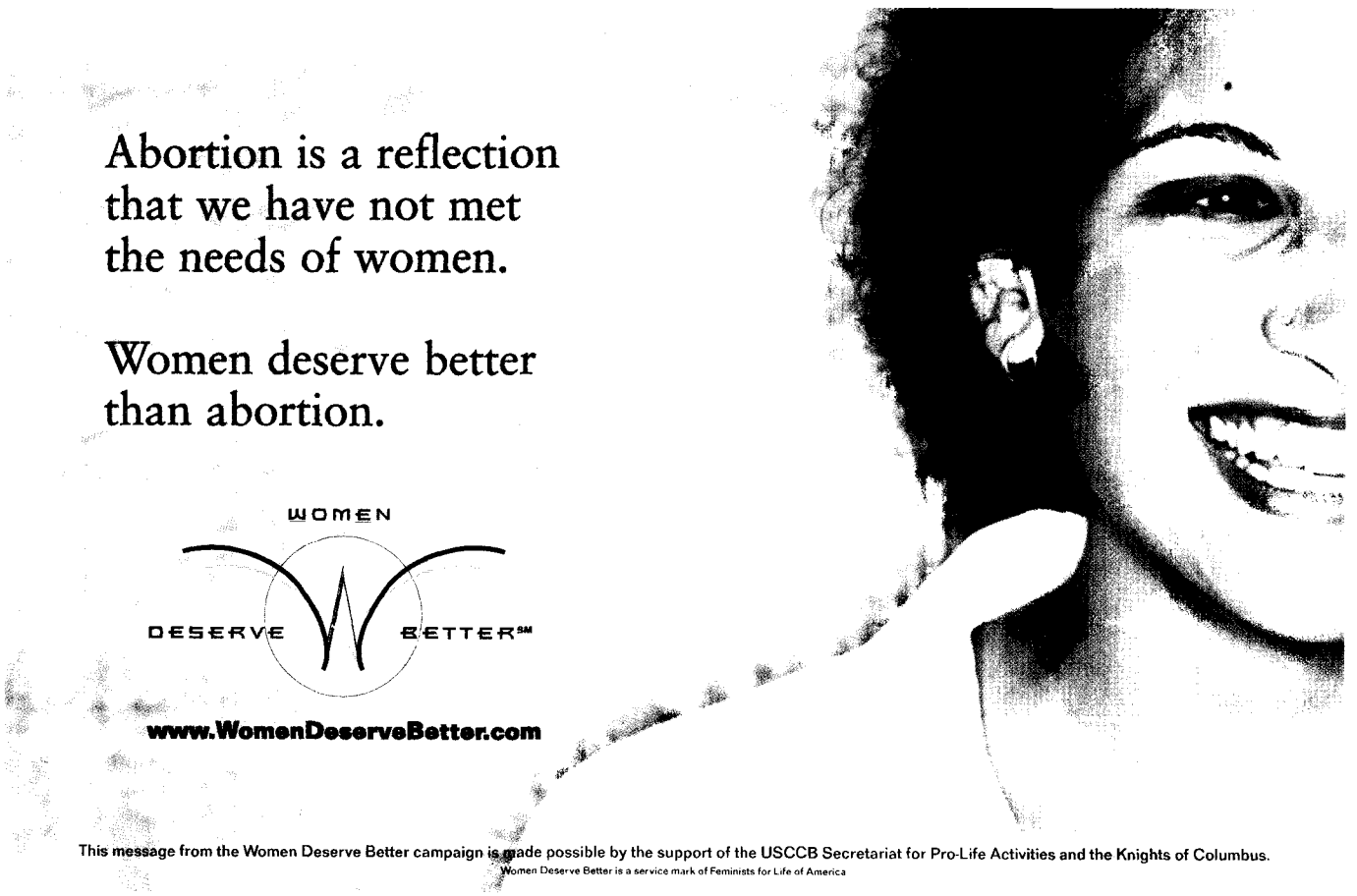
Labor seems determined to repeat its two most disastrous decisions of the last decade. Like Rabin, who saved Arafat from international isolation after the Gulf war, Mitzna would reinstate him as a negotiating partner. And like Barak, whose withdrawal from Lebanon encouraged the Palestinians to launch the current terror war, Mitzna would unilaterally withdraw under fire, beginning with Gaza. What's more, rather than pull together, Labor leaders are acting as if primaries haven't ended: Former Labor Chairman Benjamin Ben-Eliezer and Campaign Chairman Matan Vilnai routinely accuse each other of sabotaging the campaign. Even if the Sharon scandal intensifies and Labor finds itself the largest party by default, it would still be unable to form a government. The most optimistic polls show Labor getting no more than 24 seats. Mitzna has vetoed a coalition with the Likud, while Shinui, indispensable for a Labor coalition, has ruled out participation in a left-wing government. The most likely result is a narrow victory for the Likud and its further-right allies.

Yet, like Mitzna, Sharon cannot really win this election. Even if he forms the next government, he has already lost his most precious asset—his progress in reversing a lifelong reputation for recklessness and becoming a symbol of stability and consensus. Sharon's achievement had been to subordinate ideology to national unity. He sacrificed the agenda that defined his political career, opposing a Palestinian state, to rally Israelis around the agenda that defined his military career, fighting Palestinian terrorism. In so doing, he recreated the two preconditions for every past Israeli victory: national cohesion and the ability to take the war into enemy territory.

Sharon's credibility as prime minister was derived not as much from the uncritical admiration of his supporters as from the grudging respect of his opponents, who conceded his stoical devotion to Israel. Now, though, respect has been replaced by mockery that will be nearly impossible to quiet. One recent newspaper headline derisively referred to his home, the Shikmim Farm, as the Sheqalim Farm, a wordplay on Israeli currency. Worse, Sharon may have lost his ability to focus stubbornly on security; whatever moves he now orders in response to terrorism will be suspected by some Israelis to be attempts to divert attention from his personal troubles.

Already, Sharon has shown that the alleged corruption has distracted him from the duties of governing. In his aborted press conference, he didn't even mention the double suicide bombing in Tel Aviv four days earlier, which killed 24 people.

But, with Sharon discredited, there's no one left to unify the country. That absence is reinforced nightly by the TV election ads, which are broadcast together in half-hour segments, like sitcoms about a dysfunctional family. There's the party led by a 100-year-old kabbalist, a legalize marijuana party, a men's rights party. There's Shas, with Sephardim in the black suits and fedoras of Eastern Europe. There's Mitzna, promising retreat. And then there is the Likud, with commercials of earnest young people invoking trust in Sharon, filmed before the scandal broke and reminding Israelis what they've lost. ■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Bill Frist, heal thyself.

Dr. Feelgood

By JONATHAN COHN

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

RIGHT AFTER NEW Year's Day, just over a week after his colleagues elected him Senate majority leader, Bill Frist again popped up in the news, not for any political deed but for trying to save the lives of those injured in a gruesome Florida car crash. It sounded too good to be true—except to anyone who knows Frist here in Nashville. The thing that first strikes you when you start talking to friends and former colleagues of the surgeon-turned-senator is that everyone has a different story about his penchant for small acts of kindness. Janie Webb, a social worker at the Vanderbilt Transplant Center that Frist established, remembers the time Frist found out one of his patients didn't have money to cover her electric bill. He promptly paid the bill himself. Tom Nesbitt, a local physician who has known Frist since they started first grade together, recalls the senator making weekly phone calls about a mutual friend's son, stricken with cancer, for months—and then flying down for the funeral smack in the middle of a busy congressional session. Mark Tipps, who was Frist's chief of staff before returning to Nashville to practice law, still marvels at the way Frist declined to attend a 1996 campaign rally with presidential nominee Bob Dole and half of Tennessee's congressional delegation. Frist had promised to accompany his son to the Cub Scouts' Pinewood Derby races that night and wouldn't break his word. "It was at a time when a lot of Republicans were talking about family values," Tipps notes, "and he was actually doing it."

These stories may not have circulated beyond Nashville, but the image they suggest is already taking hold across the United States. Everybody now knows that Frist is a man of good deeds, from his medical crusades in sub-Saharan Africa to his on-the-spot treatment of shooting victims on Capitol Hill in 1998. More fundamentally, everybody now knows that Frist is a doctor—a profession people associate with compassion and intelligence. "[I]t is a particular stroke of genius that Bill Frist has been named Senate majority leader in a time when our political trust is once again on shaky ground," novelist Ann Patchett wrote recently in *The New York Times Magazine*. "I think a healthy dose of doctoring may be what our government needs." Or, as Maureen Dowd memorably put it, Frist is "Dr. Perfect."

And that's exactly what the White House wants him to be. A major reason Bush touted Frist as the successor to Trent Lott was that Frist seemed to be Lott's opposite—thoughtful where Lott was hardheaded, caring where Lott was indifferent, and smart where Lott was just plain dumb. Just as important, Republicans realize that Frist lends them cover on what may be their most salient political vulnerability: health care. Even today, with Republicans having narrowed the public opinion gap on many traditionally Democratic issues, voters trust Democrats more than Republicans on health care by overwhelming margins—53 percent to 33 percent, according to a December ABC News/*Washington Post* poll. "He's very articulate on issues where the Republican Party has been weak, like health care," Long Island Representative Peter King recently told *Newsday*. "We're on the defensive on patients' bill of rights and prescription drugs [for seniors], and Frist is probably the most knowledgeable about these issues as anyone in Washington today."

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But, while Frist may understand medicine, that doesn't mean he's the best person to craft health policy. Ironically, his experience as a transplant surgeon—an experience markedly different than, say, a pediatrician's—has reinforced policy notions that could make our health care system, already cruelly insensitive to the uninsured and the underinsured, even harsher. Moreover, he seems to have inherited from his family, which founded one of the nation's largest for-profit health care companies, a tendency to see the market as the solution to most problems, even as the ways the market distorts health care—everything from drug companies pushing unnecessary medications to insurance companies neglecting beneficiaries—are growing ever more evident. So, while Frist's record as a physician certainly suggests he's an uncommonly decent fellow, it also suggests that he's exactly the wrong man to address the nation's health care woes.

WILLIAM HARRISON FRIST is the least experienced politician in modern history to hold the post of Senate majority leader, having served in Congress for just eight years. But then, Frist has been attaining unattainable goals for most of his life. Back in high school, at the Montgomery Bell Academy for boys, Frist was a top student, editor of the yearbook, and president of his class for three of four years. As an underclassman, a motorcycle accident shattered his knee, but, by the time he was a senior, he had worked himself into a starting spot on the football team—at quarterback, naturally.

That made Bill Frist a rather remarkable young man—except, perhaps, by the standards being set at the white, antebellum-style mansion on Nashville's west side that Frist called home. Thomas Frist Sr., Bill's father, was the city's most prominent physician, an internist who cared for the city's political elite, including a string of seven successive governors. Bill's two brothers had each gone to medical school as well, and the older one, Thomas Frist Jr., eventually teamed up with his father to establish the Hospital Corporation of America, which, by Bill's high school years, was on its way to becoming the nation's largest chain of investor-owned hospitals. Bill's mother, Dorothy Cate Frist, was one of 14 children from a liberal Tennessee family who spent her spare time starting up political arguments on such issues as Vietnam with her more conservative husband or, when he wasn't around, the Nashville establishment.

Despite Frist's high school success, something was still missing. "Local rich kids, scions of socially prominent families, have few crosses to bear in life, but one of them is that they can never fail, not really, not the way others can," Frist would later reflect in his 1989 memoir *Transplant*. "After all, as everyone said, they had all the breaks." This would become a major theme in Frist's life—a constant, almost compulsive need to find the next mountain and climb it, to prove, as he put it, "that I could make something out of my life outside the immediate reach of my family's influence." And so, when it came time to pick a college, he decided he needed to leave the South—something no other Frist child had done—and attend Princeton. Uwe Reinhardt, the esteemed Princeton economist, still calls Frist "the brightest kid I ever had." And, while Frist indulged his interest in politics by getting his undergraduate degree from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, he stayed in the family business, winning admission to Harvard Medical School and, four years later, a surgical residency at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH).

In medicine, ambition correlates with specialty in a relatively predictable manner: The most ambitious medical students become surgeons, the most ambitious surgeons choose fields like cardiothoracic surgery, and the most ambitious cardiothoracic surgeons try to do cutting-edge procedures such as transplants. But having finished steps one and two, Frist in 1984 found no way to do step three, since Boston's conservative teaching hospitals were reluctant to do transplants, then still a new field. So Frist left MGH for Stanford, where he could study under Norman Shumway, the father of heart transplantation. "He was just a great guy, always there to pull his share of the workload and compassionate toward his patients," says Vaughn Starnes, a California surgeon who trained with Frist at Stanford. There, he became a star again, recognized by his instructors for his technical capabilities and appreciated by his friends for his collegiality.

Vanderbilt University hired Frist back to Tennessee in 1986, where his heart-transplant work lent him some celebrity. But it didn't take long before Frist was restless again: Now he wanted to build an institution. Previously, transplant surgeons worked within their own specialties—heart-transplant specialists working with the other heart surgeons, kidney-transplant specialists working with the other kidney surgeons, and so on. Frist wanted to create a multi-specialty unit where the transplant doctors could pool expertise and resources. Vanderbilt went along, and, within a few years, Frist's Vanderbilt Transplant Center had become a national model. It was after establishing this center that Frist wrote *Transplant*, not only a memoir but also a heartfelt polemic on the life-saving importance of organ transplants. (Copies included organ-donor cards.) Although not exactly a best-seller, the book further increased Frist's visibility, even prompting interest from a movie producer who wanted to cast Kevin Kline as Dr. Frist.

Transplant contains little hint that Frist was contemplating a career in politics, let alone one that would require pleasing a culturally conservative audience. He is frank about the relationship that led him to break off his engagement to his high school sweetheart two days before the wedding, even making a rather unsubtle reference to spending the night with new love Karyn—whom he would eventually marry—days before he broke off his original engagement. And, although Frist writes frequently about the ethical issues surrounding transplants—for example, the question of when death begins—he approaches these issues in starkly scientific terms, with little patience for religious objections. Near the end of the book, for example, Frist suggests changing the legal definition of "brain death" to include anencephalic babies, who are born with a fatal neurological disorder but

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show just the slightest hint of brain-stem activity. Such a change would make it possible to harvest their organs for transplant—something the Catholic Church and pro-life groups oppose. "Three thousand anencephalic babies were born a year, enough to solve our demand many times over—but we never used them," Frist writes.

Oddly enough, one of the book's few explicitly political passages is a paragraph lavishing praise upon the public official most responsible for establishing the nation's organ-transplant system: then-Senator Al Gore Jr. But, then, partisan ambiguity was another proud Frist family tradition. The list of famous patients that Frist's father treated included such notable Democrats as former Governor Prentice Cooper (father of Representative Jim Cooper) and Senator Al Gore Sr. (father of the former vice president). Frist himself had donated money to both Democrats and Republicans over the years, and, in 1992, it was a Democratic Tennessee governor, Ned McWherter, who gave Frist his first political job—presiding over a commission charged with revamping the state's Medicaid program. During the 1980s, Frist's medical friends say, they had no inkling that he was strongly conservative. "He was so diplomatic I never knew he was a Republican," Stanford's Shumway says of his star pupil. "Folks out here are pretty liberal, so I just kind of figured he was one of those people." The fact that Frist didn't even vote until 1988 makes the mistake even more understandable.

This lack of a clear political vision is one reason to take at face value Frist's oft-stated explanation for why he ultimately abandoned medicine for politics in 1994: He wasn't out to enact an ideological agenda; he simply felt the call of public service. As famous as Frist's parents were for their philanthropy—a legacy evident in Nashville today, where the city's gorgeous new cultural arts center bears the name "Frist"—they were even more well-known for giving their time. As one longtime friend recalled in a eulogy for Frist Sr., he "managed to find thirty-six hours in each of his days, and, for his patients, there was a limitless amount of time." Those who know Bill Frist say his political aspirations simply became a natural, if slightly unorthodox, extension of his work as a physician. "He told me that he'd had a rare privilege and opportunity as a physician," recalls Gus Puryear, Frist's former legislative director, "and that he thought he could affect more people through public service than he could one-on-one."

It's also worth noting that politics was yet one more way Frist could set himself apart from his family's wealth and fame, particularly at a time when he was tiring of medicine. "At Vanderbilt," says Nesbitt, "I think he felt like he'd gone as high as he could go professionally." And it was surely this ambition that explains the most important associate of his early political life: Tom Perdue. Perdue's success in managing Paul Coverdell's 1992 upset of Georgia Democratic Senator Wyche Fowler made him an obvious choice for Frist's bid to unseat another widely respected Democrat, Jim Sasser. But the two made a rather odd couple given Frist's gentlemanly manner and Perdue's reputation for brutal, extremely conservative campaigns. "He's a take-no-prisoners type—he'd go to almost any length to get his candidate where he wanted him to be," says M. Lee Smith, publisher of the *Tennessee Journal* and one of the state's best-known students of politics.

Perdue flashed this side early on, publicly calling Frist's chief primary rival "pond scum." But it took Frist a little while to get the hang of campaigning. As Perdue cringed, Frist demonstrated an unfortunate proclivity for candor, admitting at one campaign event that he had no position on gun control and stating repeatedly that, although personally opposed to abortion, he wanted to leave the matter to the states. "I'll work hard to keep the federal government out of that decision-making process," the Memphis *Commercial-Appeal* quoted him as saying. Luckily for Frist, he was running against five other primary opponents—and he had the personal wealth to finance his own race. That, plus his squeaky-clean image as a physician, won him the nomination.

By the general election, Frist had mastered the art of Perdue-style campaigning, calling Sasser a "liberal, taxing, two-faced" incumbent who was "the personification of this unresponsive, out-of-touch imperial Congress." One TV advertisement superimposed Sasser's face on Mount Rushmore alongside likenesses of liberal icons Ted Kennedy and Dan Rostenkowski. "Perdue was just cutting the living daylights out of Jim Sasser," Smith recalls. "Frist had given him wide latitude to do it, and it was a no-holds-barred effort." Sasser's negative ratings soared, from 12 percent in February to 46 percent in November, while Frist—outspending Sasser by a three-to-two margin—missed no opportunity to remind people that he was a compassionate healer and a brilliant surgeon. ("Listen, Diagnose, and Fix" was the unofficial campaign slogan.) On Election Day, he won by 200,000 votes.

THESE DAYS, FRIST still invokes his medical background at every turn. "Until today, I've always regarded my most profound professional responsibility in my professional life the blessing I had to hold in my hands the human heart, recognizing all its glory and all its potential, and then technically seating it into the chest of a dying woman to give her life and a future she would not otherwise have," Frist said upon being elected majority leader last month. "A few moments ago, my colleagues gave me a responsibility equal to that—some would even say a heavier one." While this cant gets tiresome, Frist's medical background does help explain his interest in such issues as technology and global AIDS funding. It also helps explain one of Frist's boldest political acts, his position on the nomination of Henry Foster as surgeon general in 1995. Although conservatives were attacking Foster for, among other things, his support of abortion rights, Frist knew Foster through the Frist family's long involvement with Nashville's Meharry Medical College, the nation's oldest private African American medical school. Frist voted for Foster, and although Republicans ultimately defeated the nomination anyway, Foster remains a Frist booster to this day: "This man has demonstrated his ability to

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be courageous and vote his conscience."

Another episode on which Frist's medical expertise came to bear was the controversy over stem-cell research two summers ago. In what had become a familiar ritual to his staff, Frist buried himself in original research, convened briefings by advocates from both sides, then produced a list of ten principles for governing stem-cell research. Under his proposal, scientists would be permitted to use embryos to generate stem cells just so long as they were going to be discarded anyway, as often happens with in vitro fertilization. But there was to be no creation of embryos specifically for stem-cell creation—i.e., no cloning of embryos specifically for harvesting stem cells—and the government would eventually limit the number of stem-cell lines. This position was to the right of the scientific community, which wanted no such restrictions, but to the left of hard-core conservatives, for whom any embryonic stem-cell research was immoral.

Such heresies explain why some conservatives eye him suspiciously. Just before Frist became majority leader, conservative activist Paul Weyrich, president of the Free Congress Foundation, told reporters that "Senator Bill Frist is not somebody conservatives would be comfortable with given his disposition. He's a moderate Republican at heart, who's not really pro-life." After Frist's opening address on December 23, a speech that talked about reducing racial disparities in medicine and getting health care to the uninsured, conservative columnist Robert Novak discerned an ideological heretic of a different sort: "On Dec. 23, Frist did not mention taxes. Instead, he delivered a pronouncement on health care that, with hardly any editing, could have been echoed by Senate Democratic Leader Thomas Daschle." But, as anxious Democrats have pointed out frequently during the last few weeks, Frist has voted with Trent Lott 90 percent of the time over the last eight years, making him one of the Senate's most conservative members. On nearly every important vote during his tenure, Frist has voted with the Republican leadership: for banning partial-birth abortion, against raising the minimum wage, for convicting Bill Clinton on impeachment charges, against the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reforms, and for the Bush tax cut. Notably, Frist's conservative record holds even on his signature issue, health care. In 1996, Frist voted to strip the Domenici-Wellstone mental health parity bill of a core provision, one prohibiting insurance companies from imposing stricter limitations on coverage for psychiatric illness. That same year, Frist voted against a Democratic initiative that would have restored $18 billion in Medicaid cuts.

So how does a man with no history of conspicuously partisan behavior before 1994 end up with such a conspicuously partisan voting record in the years since? One answer is that Frist is determined to win, and, as he did in his 1994 campaign, he's willing to act like a conservative firebrand if that's what it takes. Consider abortion and stem cells. Frist today calls himself "pro-life," and, indeed, the National Right to Life Committee gives him a perfect voting record on their issues. But, of the eight former medical colleagues I interviewed, not one believes that Frist's voting record is indicative of his true thinking. "I saw his comments on television just before Christmas, but I want to see what he really does," says Gus Vlahakes, who trained with Frist at MGH and remains a friend today. "If I had to take a guess, I'd say he's starting from a more moderate viewpoint than his recent comments would suggest."

Frist's floor statement during the stem-cell debate tends to support this interpretation. "Upon fertilization," Frist explained, "there is a continuum from a sperm and an egg, to a blastocyst, to a fetus, to a child, to an adolescent, to an adult. That continuum is indeed life. ... I wish to make it clear to my colleagues that from my perspective I do value life and give moral significance to the embryo and to the blastocyst and to that full continuum." Parse those sentences carefully: Frist conspicuously refers to "life" rather than "human life." And his use of the word "continuum" suggests that, while Frist may assign "moral significance" to an embryo, it's not necessarily the same significance he applies to a well-developed fetus or a newborn out of the womb. That position would put Frist at odds with the position of anti-abortion activists; indeed, the idea that the moral value of an embryo changes as pregnancy proceeds happens to be the precise logic of *Roe* v. *Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion.

BUT IF FRIST'S positions on superheated social issues seem to reflect mostly political posturing, his record on bread-and-butter issues—taxes, welfare, and, most significantly, health care—seems generally consistent with what we know about his character. In a letter to his family written in 1997 and later published as part of a memorial to him, the 87-year-old Thomas Frist Sr. said, "I am a conservative. I believe the free-enterprise system can do a better job at most things than the government can. People should learn to be self-reliant; when they are self-reliant, they will have self-respect." And, while people might assume that Bill Frist's experience as a healer would blunt this perspective, it may have actually enhanced it.

Medicine has an established sociology to it. On one end of the spectrum you have the specialists: orthopedists, ophthalmologists, cardiothoracic surgeons. On the other end, you have the primary care doctors: pediatricians, family practitioners, and some internists. Not only do surgeons make a lot more money than primary care doctors, fostering different worldviews on issues like taxes and government reimbursement levels; they also practice medicine in strikingly different ways. Surgical specialists, as the term suggests, develop deep but narrow expertise on one part of the body or even one particular procedure that a patient may need just once in a lifetime. Primary care physicians, by contrast, must consider patients as large, interrelated systems whose health they must maintain over the course of years. "The medical profession is not a monolithic community," says Howard Markel, a professor of pediatrics and the history of medicine at the University of Michigan. "Just look at the way different physicians deal with obesity. Getting somebody to go on a

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diet, not to eat McDonald's so much, to exercise, that's very hard to do and very frustrating, but it's important, and that's how a family doctor would approach the problem. Now what's the surgical solution? Stick a tube in somebody's gut, and suck out the fat."

What's more, surgeons worry a great deal about anything that might stunt technological innovation, a problem they see as related to government regulation and cost controls. Primary care physicians, on the other hand, spend a lot of time watching how outside factors—environment, poverty, lack of insurance—affect their patients' well-being, and they frequently see government as a means for correcting these problems. As Markel explains, "A lot of medicine has become much more organ-based, much more procedure-based, so the cardiologist thinks just about the heart, the surgeon who does gall bladders thinks just about that operation, and so on. The pediatricians, the internists, they tend to look at the body as a whole, thinking not just about the problems within but some of the problems without as well."

These distinctions translate into politics. Surgeons have historically been the most conservative doctors, with organizations like the American Academy of Ophthalmology among the most hostile to Medicare and government regulation. The American Academy of Pediatrics, by contrast, has long been among the nation's most persistent advocates of national health insurance. Today, seven physicians hold positions in Congress. Of the five Republicans, four are surgeons. Of the Democrats, one is a family practitioner while the other is a psychiatrist. (Psychiatrists, whose long-term relationships with patients resemble primary care doctors' more than surgeons', are also pretty liberal as a group.) There's also one physician, former Vermont Governor Howard Dean, who's running for president. He's a former family practitioner, so, naturally, he's a Democrat.

These are stereotypes, to be sure, and Frist doesn't fit them precisely. Everything we know about Frist's medical practice suggests that he was an unusually warm surgeon, and transplant surgery, by its nature, requires more postoperative contact with patients than many other specialties. But transplant surgery also fosters an unusually strong ethos of rugged individualism. With transplants, success often rests ultimately on the patient's willingness and determination to go through rehabilitation and adopt a healthier lifestyle. And transplant surgeons must constantly make decisions about which patients deserve to go on transplant lists and which ones don't. Like his father, a self-made man who disdained handouts and preached the up-by-your-bootstraps ethic, Frist became comfortable with the idea of making sharp judgments about people—something more in tune with Republican values than Democratic ones. A passage in *Transplant* recalls this advice from Frist's father: "Now we have the know-how to save some of them. Some of them—not all of them. Well, I raised you to make that decision. I raised you, and this society trained you specifically for that purpose, and you spent years learning how to make it."

Then there's Frist's family connection to hospital management company HCA. When Frist first became majority leader, accusations of conflicts of interest on health care swirled, as reporters pointed out that his family fortune—including several million dollars in HCA stock that Frist once owned and placed in a blind trust upon taking office—is tied to the company's success. In the last few weeks, critics have also raised the specter of more egregious improprieties, noting that late last year HCA agreed to pay the federal government more than $1.7 billion to settle long-standing allegations of Medicare fraud.

This is the same tack that Sasser took in 1994—and it's not working any better this time around. (Not yet, anyway.) In part, this is because Frist has never been involved in HCA's business directly. Also complicating the attacks: The fraud problems apparently occurred after HCA merged with Columbia and the Frists temporarily stepped down from company management. As for the conflict-of-interest issue, Frist notes that the Senate Ethics Committee blessed his arrangement; at this point, he says, he doesn't even know how much stock he owns.

But this doesn't mean the HCA experience is irrelevant. It's just that its significance lies in what it says about Frist's view of health care policy. The basic premise behind HCA goes back to the bedrock conservative principles that Frist Sr. wrote in that letter to his family: that the profit motive will serve the public interest, in this case by forcing the providers of health care to be more economically efficient. And that same thinking underlies Senator Frist's ideas for health care. Frist has co-sponsored with Senator John Breaux the major Medicare overhaul now favored by the Bush administration, one that would transform the large government insurance program into a system under which private insurance companies compete with Medicare for the business of beneficiaries. On the dilemma of the 43 million Americans who currently lack insurance, Frist is once again in lockstep with the White House, proposing the creation of tax credits that individuals could use to buy private health insurance coverage on the open market. And Frist has long favored laws that would expand the use of Medical Savings Accounts (MSA), a form of private insurance in which people save money in tax-shielded accounts, then use it to cover their medical bills. "When I directed the Vanderbilt Transplant Center, our entire program was transformed because one patient questioned how we differed from our competitors," Frist once said. "Establishing MSAs would encourage patients to make prudent, cost-conscious decisions about their health care needs."

Quotes like that, which Frist throws around constantly, are typical of the way he uses his medical experience to make his ideas sound sensible and compassionate. But, as HCA's history shows, the profit motive doesn't always foster tenderness. Particularly in the 1990s, as health care became far less profitable, one of the quickest ways for hospitals to make money were to see fewer charity cases. Scrutiny of the Columbia/HCA hospitals during the '90s—in the form of both academic studies and government reports—found the company

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engaging in exactly that practice. Moreover, as Robert Kuttner reported in a scathing series of articles that appeared in the *New England Journal of Medicine* six years ago, Columbia/HCA systematically downsized expensive sources of labor costs—chiefly, nursing and social workers—even though they were critical for patient well-being. Thomas Frist Jr., who was lured back to the company in 1997 in order to clean up its image, insists his family would never let the company encourage bad medicine. But, even if the Frist family really has had the best of intentions, that merely proves the point: Making money and serving patients are so fundamentally at odds that even the most enlightened executives can't always keep their companies from going astray. (Author's disclosure: My father, a Florida surgeon, has his own legal action pending against a former Columbia/HCA subsidiary over an unrelated matter.)

None of this is to say Frist's perspective on health care is entirely without merit. In keeping with his free-market orientation, he thinks the basic underlying problem with our nation's health care problems—everything from Medicare spending to the uninsured to managed care abuses—is a lack of sufficient economic incentives for patients. The current insurance system insulates people from the cost of their medical care, he says, so they seek more and more of it with little concern for how much it costs. That's why Frist favors his particular health care solutions, each of which would require people to consider the trade-offs between quality and access on the one hand and cost on the other. Under his vision for Medicare, for example, people who wanted lavish coverage—free choice of doctor, unfettered access to experimental treatment, total prescription-drug coverage—could opt to have it, but only if they were willing to pay higher premiums and co-payments. Those willing to live with less could go a cheaper route, presumably a traditional Health Maintenance Organization (HMO). Medical Savings Accounts would accomplish the same goal, by letting people decide whether they wanted to spend their tax-sheltered money on medicine or save it for other uses later on.

As insights into the problems with medical economics, Frist's ideas are sound. But they are also incomplete and ultimately lead to counterproductive policies. Transferring some responsibility for making health care spending decisions onto patients makes sense if it's done in a measured way—say, by modestly increasing premiums or co-payments for each person. But the schemes Frist favors would go much further in that direction, creating financial incentives against seeking expensive care so dramatic that they would disrupt the entire health insurance market. The more costly health care becomes on an individual basis, the more healthy people—who can afford to go without expensive care—will opt for the skimpiest plans. That will leave the truly ill, whose health situations force them to opt for more complete coverage, alone in their plans, driving their costs up. For example, one respected analysis of Medical Savings Accounts, published in 1996 by the Urban Institute, estimated that if large numbers of healthier people opt for medical savings accounts, insurance premiums for everybody else could increase by 60 percent—likely more than many could afford, thereby swelling the ranks of the uninsured even more.

On a more basic level, the fact that Frist has practiced medicine at the very top of his field seems to have insulated him from the experiences of people who suffer most under the current health care regime: the uninsured. Frist apparently saw some charity cases at Vanderbilt, but, as he notes in his memoir, the university had special funding to help pay for many of them. Late in the book, he notes that the high numbers of uninsured in the United States is a growing crisis, but then he insists, as he continues to today, that it's going to be up to private insurance to solve the problem. A physician who had actually spent extensive time working closely with the uninsured—say, in a public clinic, where their financial hardship would be in plain view—would understand instinctively what academics are now showing: that a market approach to the uninsured inevitably leaves out those who need insurance most. "Tax credits for non-group health insurance would not make a major dent in the number of the uninsured," says Jonathan Gruber, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist who has done influential research on the subject. "The credits are simply too small relative to the high and variable cost of non-group insurance to make a difference for most low-income uninsured families. Moreover, the small number of uninsured who do take up the credits will be the most young and healthy uninsured who can find affordable policies."

Finally, Frist's views on Medicare also reflect a perspective wildly out of sync with what most people actually on Medicare seem to believe. Frist, a regular critic of the Medicare bureaucracy, frequently speaks of the need to "modernize" the program—as if its antiquity were a source of massive dissatisfaction. That may reflect how most surgeons feel, since they don't like Medicare's paperwork, but it couldn't be further from the sentiments of Medicare recipients. Although they desperately want a drug benefit, seniors want it as part of Medicare as it exists now. And who can blame them? In contrast to private managed care plans, which limit patient choice about doctors and treatment, Medicare allows beneficiaries to see almost anybody. A study in *Health Affairs* released this October compared satisfaction rates between Medicare beneficiaries with people on private insurance. The Medicare beneficiaries were overwhelmingly happier with their insurance, even without the prescription-drug coverage.

Of course, many people assume that Frist will never get to remake Medicare anyway, that the program's popularity will preclude sweeping changes. Many of the same people assume that, however extraordinary Frist's talents, he is bound to fail as Senate majority leader: He's too green, too wonky, too *nice*. But, as Sasser can attest, Frist knows how to play hardball. He got away with it, in part, because voters in 1994 couldn't bring themselves to see a physician—particularly such a compassionate and dedicated one—as the calculating and ambitious politician he had become. Who's to say he can't do it again? ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Mortalities

SUICIDE IN AN artwork is almost always a good investment. It virtually guarantees that, whatever the ultimate view of the work, it will be taken seriously. **The Hours** (Paramount), like the Michael Cunningham novel that is its base, is considerably helped by that investment. Three suicide attempts, two of them successful, provide the atmosphere of the film. Life is attended throughout by the possibility of exit, and, paradoxically enough, this immanence of death gives the story its pulse.

Cunningham's novel is a suite of variations on the fiction and the facts of Virginia Woolf, in both of which suicide looms. The novel in point is *Mrs. Dalloway*, the working title of which was *The Hours*, and in that book an unbalanced war veteran opts out. Woolf herself ended in the River Ouse, her pockets stuffed with rocks. The screen adaptation of Cunningham was done by the English playwright and film-maker David Hare, whose best picture, *Wetherby*, is itself built on the shock of a suicide. The director was Stephen Daldry—no previous work about suicide that I know, but here he keeps the ambience close, confidential, as if secrets were in the air.

Three women are the chief subjects: Woolf herself, especially on her last day; Clarissa Vaughan, a modern New York editor; and Laura Brown, who is first seen as a Los Angeles housewife in 1951 and is subsequently seen today. Clarissa of course shares her first name with Mrs. Dalloway, but outside of the fact that she is giving a party and buying the flowers herself, this Clarissa is unconnected with Woolf's novel. Laura is reading the novel in 1951, but there is no hint that the suicide in the book has anything to do with her own temptation. The oddity of Cunningham's work, made even more striking in the film, is that Woolf's own death is much more important to the atmosphere than is her novel. It's the stone-stuffed pockets that are essential, not *Mrs. Dalloway*.

The party that today's Clarissa is giving at her Greenwich Village home is to celebrate a poetry prize that her ex-lover, Richard, has just received. (She and he, affectionate still, have gone their homosexual ways.) Richard, who lives nearby, is far along in the agony of AIDS. Clarissa's intended party is not a silly attempt to cheer him up: it is to help verify his existence. Richard, however, has an escape hatch in the back of his aching head.

Laura, in 1951, is closer to Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway than is the modern Clarissa of New York. Laura has an adoring husband, a child, reasonable comfort. Yet one day she leaves her boy with a neighbor, takes a purse full of pills and a copy of Woolf's book to a hotel room, lies down, bares her pregnant belly, and considers her pills. She does not take them. As we learn, she undergoes a different change, which is eventually revealed through the fate of her son. That son is the poet, Richard. The three strands of the story, seemingly disparate, finally integrate.

The ailing Richard is played by Ed Harris with bitter ferocity. (It is he who illuminates the title. When Clarissa tells the racked man that he doesn't have to come to the party if he doesn't want to, he makes the Beckettian reply: "But there are still the hours, aren't there? One and then another, and you get through that one and then, my god, there's another." He escapes the infinitude of time by the same means as the veteran in Woolf's novel.) Meryl Streep, who plays Clarissa, suggests the pitch of the hectic life in which this woman lives, within which she struggles to remain herself. Julianne Moore, as Laura, meets the prime difficulty of her role: in the hotel room, this cake-baking housewife reveals a despair that has been well hidden. As Woolf, Nicole Kidman has an easier time of it: nothing needs to be revealed, all is painfully apparent. Kidman needs only to do what she is given to do, which she accomplishes thoughtfully enough.

But the film lives in an adduced gravity. Woolf's finish, affecting just because it is Woolf's finish, is used to aggrandize the two other stories. Her suicide in 1941 has nothing to do with Clarissa or even with Richard's fate. (His trouble is physical, not mental.) Laura is somewhat more a refraction of Woolf, but her drama and Richard's, too, rely almost impertinently on Woolf herself. Cunningham's novel was helped by his prose, which curves gracefully in the historical present to unify the book in some degree. Stripped of that tegument, the film depends more blatantly on Woolf's fate to give it organism and depth.

With **The Pianist** (Focus), Roman Polanski pays his dues. Born in Kraków in 1933, he escaped from the ghetto when he was eight and spent the war years in various phases of flight. His childhood experience has often been considered in relation to the quite different themes of his films, but at last he has chosen a subject right from the heart of that experience.

The screenplay derives, in Ronald Harwood's adaptation, from the autobiography of Wladyslaw Szpilman, a Polish-Jewish pianist who had found some success before the war. He, his parents, and his siblings undergo the harassments and sufferings of German oppression, and it is only because he is able-bodied enough for the work force that he avoids the concentration-camp fate of his family. After numerous hazards, all dreadful, his life is saved at the end by his music. Shortly before the arrival of the Soviet army, a German captain discovers Szpilman in hiding, finds out that he is a pianist, and asks him to play. The captain apparently enjoys the irony of saving a Jew because of his musical ability. The Soviets soon cap the irony.

Polanski has never directed better. Life in the Warsaw ghetto under the Germans is put before us with a kind of terrible patience. As Szpilman, Adrien Brody endures his fate with doggedness rather than heroism. Scene after scene, image after image, chills the viewer's blood. One shot I'll never forget: the ragged Szpilman walks toward us from the middle distance, down a wide, absolutely devastated, otherwise empty street. It is more than a picture; it is an epitome.

But *The Pianist* propounds a now-familiar dilemma. Shall there be a continual flow of films on this subject? Should there be continual reminders? Or have the images been sufficiently burned into our brains? Isn't there a risk of a Holocaust genre? In short, is *The Pianist* needed? To name only one of its predecessors—for me, the towering one—doesn't *Schindler's List* do everything that Polanski achieves and more? Particularly in light of his personal history, plus the art of his rendition, it seems almost treacherous to note that this film is belated in the film world. ■

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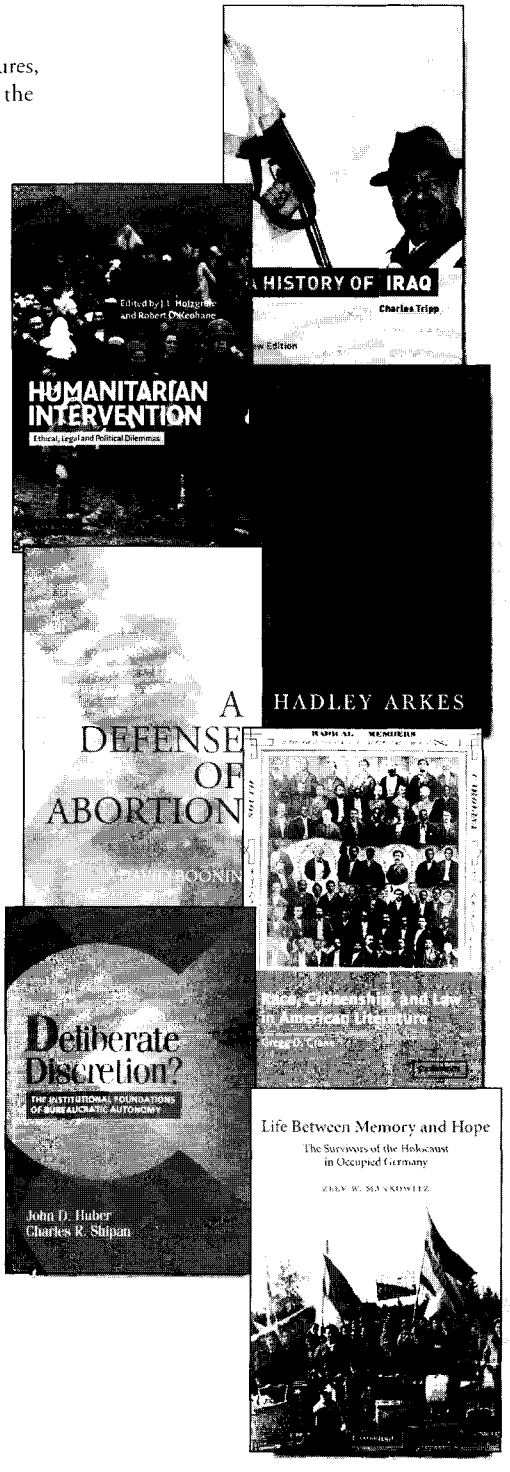

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Jed Perl on Art

Unity and Variety

ARTISTS ARE SPECIALISTS. They use paint or they make three-dimensional objects; their work is abstract or it is representational; they keep to certain themes. If they work with a video camera or with computer technology, they frequently become known for that and only that. It is true that anti-specialization—as represented by an artist such as Bruce Nauman, who has worked with video and neon and wallboard and wax—has become a strong direction in recent decades, and widely discussed shows this season by Tracey Emin and Anselm Kiefer have included both two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects; but most contemporary artists remain specialists, and the reasons are plain to see. The intensity that we want from art usually emerges only when an artist knows a medium or a kind of structure or a certain vocabulary inside out. This has certainly been true in the past few months in New York, when there has been much more to hold a gallerygoer's attention in Robert Ryman's intricate workings of small strokes of white paint or Avigdor Arikha's tiny pastels of leafy urban corners or Thornton Willis's easily brushed concatenations of triangular forms than in Emin's neon signage and crabby embroideries or in the sculptures in Kiefer's show at the Gagosian Gallery, which could easily have been mistaken for random hunks of concrete pulled off a construction site.

Specialization in art, like specialization in every area of life, has its dangers, especially when it becomes a form of sectarianism. The idea that one medium or structure or style or genre trumps all others does not jibe with the lively, variegated experience that gallerygoers and museumgoers are quite right to expect. What we hope for from a genuine artist is an exploration of some aspect of art that is so compelling that it enables us to grasp almost simultaneously both the unity and the multiplicity of art. Works of art, which hold us first and last with their freestanding value, can do all kinds of things: they can be abstract or representational, they can provoke narrative or metaphoric experiences, they can heighten our sense of touch or our sense of sight. Specialization in the arts, where it has the hard-won intensity of a personal view, is not a flight from some general belief in the making of things; it is something more like a case in point. Every forceful choice that an artist makes, by implying or acknowledging other choices, throws into relief some aspect of the variety of art, and thereby bids us see the unity of art from a particular vantage point.

WITHOUT A TRUE feeling for craft, no artist can grasp either the variety or the unity of art. Narrowly defined, craft suggests the most specific skills—something as basic as a way of applying oil paint or gouache or watercolor to a particular kind of surface. But craft can also be defined far more broadly, as a way of understanding the very nature of art through hands-on experience, the experience not only of various media but also of various structural and stylistic possibilities. To have a feeling for craft is to have a way of grappling with all the specifics—and, ultimately, to have a way of precipitating the transformations that are the essence of art. Craft is what you have before the transformations have taken place. Art is craft transformed. And if much contemporary work seems to reflect an almost complete incomprehension of the nature of craft, one strange aspect of that incomprehension is a tendency to adopt craft as a pose, as its own justification.

Going through "Drawing Now: Eight Propositions," an exhibition of work by more than two dozen artists that Laura Hoptman organized at the Museum of Modern Art in Queens this fall, I felt as if I were being assaulted by a pack of mindless showoffs. There was an unseemliness about the way that craft was presented in this exhibition. When David Thorpe renders landscapes with bits of collaged colored paper, or Takashi Murakami produces slick porn-cartoon figures, or Chris Ofili draws lots of teensy heads to create a curious beadwork effect, craft is nothing more than a cottage industry. Cottage industries can have their fascination. I was beguiled by a couple of works on paper by Simon Frost in a show called "The Microwave" at the Cristinerose/Josée Bienvenu Gallery in September. In Frost's quirky minimalist images, the jittery, pulsing patterns are made not with pencil but with carbon paper, so that what we have is a sort of primitive printmaking. By creating originals using an old-fashioned, nearly defunct reproductive medium, Frost manages to give his marks a muffled poetic tingle. And Frost doesn't overplay his hand, which is not something that I can say for most of the artists included in "Drawing Now." There was something oppressive and self-satisfied about the variety of this show at MoMA. The whole event had a self-congratulatory air, and the kind of carefully pre-packaged anarchic aesthetic that seems to assure a hit with critics who pride themselves on their very advanced taste. "Drawing Now" was an anthology of attitudes. The variety was rootless.

WHEN ARTISTS ARE most truly alive, we sense their hunger for variety through their effort to create a work that, in its very individuality, adds to the range of what art can do. Over the years, over the centuries, the very range of art has inspired extraordinary debates about the superiority of one genre or style over another, and the story of art as a fast-forward adventure has often been told in terms of the superiority of realism over classicism, or of painting over sculpture, or of the non-utilitarian object over the utilitarian one. From the debates during the Renaissance about the relative superiority of painting or sculpture to the modern claims that abstract art is the purest embodiment of the possibilities of art, there has often been an idea of a style or a form that trumped all other styles or forms. When Herder, in his book *Plastik*—first published in 1778 and now available in a complete translation, under the title *Sculpture*, from the University of Chicago Press—suggests a distinction between painting and sculpture by observing that "sight gives us *dreams*, touch gives us *truth*," we appreciate the deft way that he shapes this competition between two kinds of experience. We also know that the arts, by constantly engaging more and more of our senses, tend to shatter the very definitions that we construct. Herder's epigram can have a paradoxical power, for it serves to remind us that Brancusi gives us dreams and Rembrandt gives us truth.

For much of the past century, abstract art, and abstract painting especially, has been said to be the most purely visual of the visual arts—a sort of epitome of the visual arts. And yet nowadays when new abstract painting strikes us with force and originality, we do not feel that we are

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in the presence of the whole truth so much as that we are in the presence of a particular form of knowledge or expression. We feel not that abstraction trumps representation, but that abstraction has its own kind of naturalness. In new abstract paintings by Shirley Jaffe, Robert Ryman, and Thornton Willis that were to be seen this fall, abstraction is an impulse distinct from the representational impulse but necessarily linked to it in the complex totality that we sense in art.

Shirley Jaffe telegraphs her sense of the unity of the arts through the echoes and the nuances and the counter-themes that she weaves into her work, so that what she boldly asserts as her side of the truth is accompanied by quiet suggestions of other aspects of the truth. Her new paintings, at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, with their array of clean-edged, brilliantly colored forms, have a what-you-see-isn't-quite-what-you-see ambiguity that mocks their *soigné* purity. Jaffe, an American who is a longtime resident of Paris, gives her abstract shapes a boisterous animation. Without ever exactly becoming animals or vegetables or exclamation points, these forms, arranged on white grounds, suggest such things. At times in this exhibition, especially when Jaffe experiments with translucencies of color and elaborately overlapped effects, I felt that she was indulging a little too much in her own paradoxes. But when Jaffe is at her singular best, especially in the painting called *Bruit d'été*, the result is a happily inebriated Constructivism—purism on the perfect New Year's Eve binge. Jaffe is a tough-minded trickster, a clown doing her own thing amid the three-ring circus of abstract ebullience that we associate with Calder, Arp, and Miró.

Abstract painting is an abstraction of character or personality as much as it is an abstraction of nature. And what holds a gallerygoer in the best work that Robert Ryman and Thornton Willis have done recently is the excitement of watching artists who are interested in exercising certain possibilities that they see in art and, therefore, in themselves. While white pigment has been pretty much the only pigment to be seen in Ryman's paintings for decades, his white does not suggest the infinity that Malevich, the first painter of white-on-white canvases, saw in that pigment. Ryman's white is not everything, it is an aspect of things. His work is at its best—and his show at PaceWildenstein in Chelsea in October was his best show in a long time—when he seems to be enjoying the possibilities that his self-imposed limitations provoke. The most effective paintings in the show were canvases three or four feet square, in which Ryman's flurries and gatherings of white strokes, often worked over and obliterating an undercoat of a solid color, suggest a peculiarly modern lacework. The individual strokes have an evenness of weight that seems slightly methodical, and this somehow gives a welcome air of astringency to images that, with their finicky self-involvement and their hair's-breadth variations of stroke and counter-stroke, can also suggest a rococo fantasy.

COURTESY TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

Shirley Jaffe, *Bruit d'été*, 2001

Ryman's restrained lyricism makes a bolder impression here than it has in much of his work of recent years, where his experiments with supports such as vinyl and aluminum, or with peculiar ways of attaching the paintings to the wall with exposed metal fasteners, have turned painting into an avant-garde recipe book in which everything has been considered except the senses.

Looking at Ryman's strongest paintings, I have the feeling that the artist is simply seeing where his brushwork will take him, and a similar sort of easygoing, matter-of-fact mood animates a quartet of new paintings by Thornton Willis, shown at a place called The Space in the Chelsea Market in October. Willis's arrays of triangular shapes, which are packed into networks or unfurled in fan-like configurations, have a knockabout resplendence of color, whether he is working with stained-glass-deep reds and blues or with the dusty greens and yellows of fallen leaves in late autumn. In these new paintings Willis easily tops the formal bravura of his work of two decades ago, when one of his large paintings with a singular triangular form was included in an international survey at the Museum of Modern Art. Although Willis was always a powerful painter, he seems to me to be a far more inviting artist now, when he is multiplying his triangular forms, playing with different ranges of color, using informal brushwork that has a calligraphic abruptness. There is a fascinating mixture of delicacy and boldness to this work. Willis gives his geometric constructions a loose-limbed insouciance. He refuses to be sanctimonious about what he obviously regards as the archetypal nature of the triangle; he takes his archetypes in stride. He engages with familiar forms in much the way that an optimist goes through the routines of an ordinary day, assuming that any old thing can turn out to be a little bit extraordinary.

Ryman, Willis, and Doug Ohlson, another abstract painter who exhibited

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recent work this fall, have been known in New York for decades. While they owe a great deal to Abstract Expressionism, the power of their painting now depends on their ability to put some distance between their work and the hubris of New York School painting in its imperial phase, when the hyper-unified images of Newman and Reinhardt were so often understood as assertions that variety was dead. The weakness of Doug Ohlson's recent work, seen in a twenty-year retrospective at the Times Square Gallery of Hunter College, has everything to do with his sense that a painting must be a self-enclosed system, a solution to a problem. The paintings have none of the let's-try-it spirit that you find in the most inviting pared-down abstractions of Ellsworth Kelly or Myron Stout or Salvatore Federico. In Ohlson's work, the repetition on long horizontal formats of warm-on-warm juxtapositions of candy-bright colors never go beyond a decorative belligerence. Although there may be some hedonistic wit to Ohlson's full-out looming color, the canvases come across as oppressively programmatic. There is something unpleasantly competitive about the insistence of the effects, as if Ohlson were more concerned with convincing us of the superiority of this group of forms over some other group of forms than with the interest of what he has to show us. I am attracted by the seriousness of Ohlson's enterprise and by the trust that he places in a purity of means, but after a while I begin to suspect that he believes that this is all there is, and I end up feeling that Ohlson has, perhaps inadvertently, defamed the variety of art.

There is an insistence to Ohlson's work that leaves me with the uncomfortable sense that he is laying down the law. While I am not immune to the fascination of an artist who gives us the almost melodramatic excitement of first and last principles, an artist also has to make some room for the meandering ordinariness of looking and thinking about looking, which is itself a part of looking. And the experience of looking at a painting, for the viewer as much as for the artist, includes an awareness of what is *not* included in the painting. Part of the way that we judge what we see is by taking into account what we are not being shown. The sting of specificity involves a sense of distinctions. While studies in aesthetics and the psychology of art tend to follow a single argument to the end, the experience of art involves a jostling variety of almost simultaneous experiences and reflections. The argument for the essentially optical nature of the visual arts (an argument that obviously has something to do with Ohlson's work), as well as recent discussions of the artist's sense of his or her own physicality (which are sometimes seen as offering an escape from older forms of idealist aesthetics), can have a relentlessness that denies our ability simultaneously to take in what is before our eyes and to speculate on what we are seeing.

A WORK THAT fills our eyes, through the very assurance with which it does so, will put us in tune with the workings of the artist's hand. Optical and tactile values, far from competing for our attention, as some theorists would have it, may complement one another. I felt this quite forcibly in Avigdor Arikha's show at the Marlborough Gallery in September. Arikha's subjects have the close-up insistence of vignettes, whether he is concerned with a closet crammed full of painting materials, or a corner of Paris, or the face of a friend. When Arikha works in oil, I find that there is too much evenness to his effects: the paint, thinly applied, can feel nearly weightless. But when he works with pastel, especially in some intimately scaled studies that deal with the flashes of deep green foliage that you sometimes find amid the gray stone walls of a city, the pace of the work quickens and the emotions intensify. The pastel medium, with its stubborn physicality, becomes an actor in the drama. Even a gallerygoer who does not know that pastel is basically a stick of dry medium, a pressed powder, will see in these pictures not just color but also the tactility of the stuff, its quality of being both solid and frangible. We are, obviously, taking in with our eyes what Arikha does. And yet part of what we experience is the curious, almost passive-aggressive physicality of the medium. Arikha is wonderfully accomplished with pastel. He knows how to coax melting effects out of this recalcitrant medium, and his facility has a drama to it; he turns the dry, powdery pigment into damp foliage and cool stone. The medium becomes the narrative that animates the urbanist's pastoral vignette.

Sight, touch, process, and metaphor are never mutually exclusive in art. The unity of the arts is not only a function of the shared roots of different media but also of the essentially knit-together nature of sight and touch, form and content, process and result. For the sophisticated gallerygoer, abstraction or representation is always present as the other choice, the thing that could have been done. In refusing to do everything, an artist acknowledges the existence of some other thing. I like the zest for representation that Lisa Zwerling brings to some small paintings of wolves in forest settings that were included in her show at the First Street Gallery in November; she seems to be saying that realism is worth fighting for. Zwerling gives a nervous athleticism to the brushwork in these little scenes, and her meticulous renderings of fur and bark and foliage somehow help to keep an overarching painterly rhythm going. Some of her best paintings, done a decade or so ago, were sexual tableaux of men and women and animals in which the artist's immaculate painterly technique gave a winning clarity to themes that I would have been inclined to dismiss as fin-de-siècle kitsch. In her new paintings Zwerling's wolves are alone, pacing the forest or sleeping in the underbrush, and her flickering brushwork signals her attentiveness, her complicity in their mysterious feelings. These paintings, less than two feet high, are among the best that she has done. In recent years Zwerling has pursued related themes on far larger canvases, and while she never exactly lets go of her classicizing lucidity, she has sometimes seemed in danger of losing control of her domain. In the bigger canvases Zwerling aims to convince us that this is the whole world. She is dreaming of the complete painting, of the painting that does everything; and our modern appetite for the variety of art can make us rebel.

COMPLETENESS IN ART is most convincing when it is presented as a private matter, for we no longer believe that there is any one way of doing things. The trouble that Zwerling has with the grand manner in her big paintings is not unrelated to Lennart Anderson's trouble with the large pastoral visions that have preoccupied him over the years, several of which were included in a survey of his work at Salander-O'Reilly Galleries in October. And in a strange way the questions raised by these two representational painters when they work on a fairly large scale are not entirely unrelated to the questions raised by Doug Ohlson, who also works on large sizes. A canvas that is six (or more) feet high or wide is not large by contemporary standards, but when a painter approaches such a canvas with the thought of working in a grand manner—a grand manner that can as easily be abstract as representational—the effect may be to shut out other possibilities, not just for himself or herself, but for us as well. When Anderson constructs a complex arcadian vision full of densely modeled

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figures or Ohlson presents abstract painting as an enveloping coloristic experience, they are both attempting to put all the things that mean the most to them together into a coherent whole. In doing so, they are invoking, I think, an old idea of unity, the idea that unity is the culmination of experience, a kind of finality. And that idea rarely rings true today, when unity is something more like a hunger for completeness that we recognize mostly through the absence of completeness.

I admire the virtuosity of the various elements that go to make up a large composition by Lennart Anderson such as *Idyll III*, with its dancers and dreamers and musicians. Working on his pastoral compositions for years—*Idyll III* was described as "in progress"—Anderson revels in the slow pile-up of pigment, and he certainly knows how to set off a vibration between the powerfully rendered figures and the richly colored lyricism of the landscape. Yet there is a strain to the mastery, and it is not only that Anderson cannot quite solve the painting formally. The peculiar fissures that keep opening up in these canvases are more than spatial or coloristic. Perhaps Anderson himself is too much the empiricist to quite believe in these arcadian environments; at times this scrupulous artist seems trapped between a reconstruction of ancient Greece and a near-journalistic report on a weekend of fun and games among the Woodstock generation.

Anderson's painting comes completely alive when he works in smaller formats, where his spectacular academic technique takes on the self-containment of a private fantasy. In his intimate landscapes and still lifes and portraits, he insists on a certain kind of fullness and completeness of form not as a general principle but as a way of proceeding that jibes with some inner necessity. There is a quiet ferocity to these works that holds us in the gallery—and holds, later on, in the mind. In a recent portrait of a young man included at Salander-O'Reilly, the head is a volume that is realized with a striking earnestness, and the bare suggestion of background gives a beautiful modesty to the artist's awesome rendering of the dark eyes and handsome, fleshy face. Anderson's paint-handling is tenderly resolute; what strikes me about the impeccable technique is not so much its authority as its authenticity. Anderson's smaller compositions rarely have any hint of the camp antiquarianism that sometimes infects his bigger paintings. His impassioned traditionalism achieves an austerely modern matter-of-factness.

A complex narrative seldom succeeds in contemporary art, unless the artist is somebody like R. B. Kitaj, Gabriel Laderman, or Leland Bell, artists who know how to build the fissures right into the work. These painters take it for granted that every synthesis must be a shattered synthesis, and in doing so they reject the proposition that there is an a priori wholeness to representational art that mirrors the wholeness of the world as we know it. Kitaj, Laderman, and Bell create a bridge between representation and abstraction, for we tend to take it for granted that abstract painters are masters at rendering fissures and ambiguities. In the retrospective of Carroll Dunham's paintings at the New Museum this season, I was reminded all over again of what a wonderful way this artist had with ambiguities in the mid-1980s, when he was patching together surfaces out of rectangles of wood veneer and layering them with a delicious surfeit of joke-book forms, playfully following the whorls of the grain in the veneer with Day-Glo colors and then piling on tornadoes and constellations of surrealist doodads. I wish Dunham had held on to that crazy informality. Instead, he was overtaken by a raging hunger for overarching, peremptory unity, and the result has been the howling disappointment that his work has become since the mid-1990s, with all the graphic wit subsumed in a dullard's renderings of cartoon characters who ought to have been left in the head-trip comic books where they belong.

Bombast comes in all forms, and nowadays a lot of people in the art world seem obsessed with bombastic eccentricity, especially when it is projected on a vast scale. This surely explains the appeal of Anselm Kiefer, whose mural-scale dimensions and charged historical themes are believed by many to have revitalized the Wagnerian ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This season Kiefer has been at it again, presenting himself at the Gagosian Gallery in Chelsea as the gonzo kabbalist of the avant-garde, with a show of paintings and sculpture called "Merkaba" (Ezekiel's "chariot," which became the mystical Hebrew term for the structure of the godhead). Kiefer promises us a vision of Creation and Heaven and who knows what else and then delivers nothing but his usual gray-on-gray brand of desideratum chic. In the 1980s Kiefer was busy devouring all of German civilization and spitting it back at an eager audience; he is now offering to do the same for Jewish civilization, and many Jews seem flattered.

The Gagosian Gallery has published a

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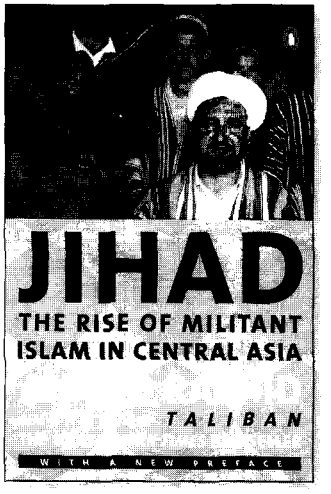

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portentous catalogue with an essay by Harold Bloom, a critic who no longer has patience for anything but the big things. Bloom and Kiefer are a perfect match: two size queens in hipster Hebraicist heaven. Bloom's latest book is titled *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds*, and Kiefer is a genius or he is nothing at all. I'd vote for nothing at all. At Gagosian Kiefer offers his predictable mixed-media effects, this time with lots of lead objects and some burnt books and pieces of glass, and Bloom, who has perhaps not noticed that mixed media is a venerable tradition, praises Kiefer for "knowingly transcend[ing] the limits of any visual art." Judged by that standard, even Michelangelo, whose Adam makes an appearance on the jacket of Bloom's *Genius*, is a modest talent.

Bloom praises Kiefer as "a beacon of aesthetic self-trust." I can sympathize with this call for independence, but the more vexing question for contemporary artists is how the independence that they convey through the particularity of their work can, simultaneously, speak to our sense of the unity of art. In the democratic artistic atmosphere of the past several hundred years, when styles and forms and media have come, more and more, to register as personal avowals, the unity of art is no longer a gathering together of divergent tendencies through the power of some overarching force so much as it is an underlying sense of the fascinating commensurability of different kinds of artistic experiences. I believe that we experience this sense of commensurability in the very act of looking at art, for a powerfully immediate experience sets off a kind of dialectical tingle, an almost involuntary need to see what we are not seeing. The authority with which an artist does certain things sharpens my sense that there are other kinds of things that can be done. Such authority is grounded in the imperatives of craft, which is not so much a show of skill as it is a tradition of artistic specialization, a tradition with a history so long and so complex that nobody can fully comprehend either its variety or its unity. That is the essential enigma that confronts every artist. For the artist who believes that individuality, by expressing variety, can suggest unity, the immersion in craft will inevitably become a test of character. ■

The Sophomore

By JACKSON LEARS

The Skeptic: A Life of H. L. Mencken by Terry Teachout

(HarperCollins, 410 pp., $29.95)

I.

WHEN I WAS growing up in Maryland in the 1960s, H. L. Mencken still possessed the status of a demigod. He was the Sage of Baltimore and the scourge of the Bible Belt (a term that he coined), an impresario of words who deflated pomp, pep, and cant with equal panache. To adolescent boys of an intellectual bent, those who had read *The Catcher in the Rye* and felt surrounded by phonies, Mencken's hyperbolic war on hypocrisy was an inspiration. Against the vacant fun of Rotarians and the missionary fervor of moralists, Mencken reaffirmed a civilized way of life. Or so it seemed at the time.

But revisiting the idols of youth can be a dispiriting business. In subsequent years and on closer inspection, Mencken's politics of style have begun to seem rather threadbare. Behind his relentless assaults on "Puritanism" lay a pinched and parochial mentality, tarted up with Nietzschean bravado but conventional to the core. Mencken had made up his mind about everything by the time he was twenty-five, and he never changed it. His literary and political criticism was often little more than a parade of petit-bourgeois prejudices, about as enlightening as a Saturday-morning seminar in any barbershop full of right-thinking citizens.

The sworn enemy of the "booboisie" was a bit of a boob himself. Like any narrow-minded know-it-all, Mencken was given to sweeping dismissals of entire social groups, including teachers ("the most ignorant and stupid class of men in the whole class of mental workers"), farmers (a "rabble of peasants who sleep in their underclothes"), and Jews ("the most unpleasant race ever heard of"). The champion of Theodore Dreiser was unable to embrace or even to understand the writers who emerged from World War I. Hemingway, Mencken thought, was simply trying to prove he was a "naughty fellow"; Faulkner made no more sense to him than "the wop boob, Dante." Even Thomas Mann eluded Mencken's appreciation, despite his filiopietistic fondness for all things German. The ferment of modernism, from Cézanne and Proust to Isadora Duncan, failed to arouse even a flicker of curiosity in this allegedly bold critic of bourgeois conventions. The arch-foe of philistinism had a blind spot for art and a tin ear for poetry.

MENCKEN'S POLITICS WERE virtually indistinguishable from those of a small businessman who felt beleaguered by malingering workers and welfare frauds—and a cold-hearted one at that. He remained indifferent to the suffering caused by the Great Depression, convinced that the only original idea in the New Deal was the notion that "whatever A earns really belongs to B. A is any honest and industrious man or woman. B is any drone or jackass." To be fair, his libertarianism was at least consistent: unlike the contemporary breed of "conservatives," he opposed the government's attempt to police what people chose to put into their bodies. (His assaults on Prohibition should be required reading for William Bennett and the other virtuous advocates of our disastrous "war on drugs.") But like many libertarians, he was spooked by the specter of majority tyranny. His desultory reading of Nietzsche reinforced his faith that mob rule was at hand and left him unable to see the anti-democratic trends in twentieth-century American politics—the tendency of managerial elites to remove more and more of the machinery of government from popular influence or even awareness. Contemptuous of the common herd even as he shared many of its convictions, Mencken remained convinced that he was a member of the "civilized minority."

This may account for Mencken's continuing attraction to right-wing intellectuals-in-training—young men for whom reading him is akin to wearing suspenders, a way to demonstrate that petit-

JACKSON LEARS is the editor of *Raritan*. His book *Something for Nothing: Luck in America* has just been published by Viking.

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bourgeois politics can co-exist with clever elegance, providing a stylish alternative to the drabness of the politically correct. If Foucault is the favorite Nietzschean of the postmodern left, Mencken plays the same role on the postmodern right. He hovers in the fantasy life of many a William F. Buckley wanna-be, legitimating that sense of innate superiority that one can only call sophomoric. The word is easily abused (mostly by middle-aged critics impatient with youthful excess), but in this case it is indispensable. The sophomore acquires the trappings of learning and leaves it at that; he is content to know what he knows.

So was Mencken. Submerged in a torrent of occasionally inventive verbiage, his ideas remained formulaic for fifty years. To be sure, his love affair with words left some enduring monuments. He relished the vagaries of vernacular speech and paid eloquent homage to them in *The American Language*. He also produced a readable and entertaining autobiography. Yet suppleness of thought was not in his line. Year in and year out, he dusted off the same Victorian mental furniture—positivism, naturalism, laissez-faire economics—and displayed it as if it were a bold departure from conventional norms. In the end he fell victim to the cruelties of fate. Debilitated by a series of strokes, he sank into a truly pitiable senescence—surrounded by books he could no longer read, grumbling about "the morons" on the radio. But his mind had ceased developing decades earlier. It's a little sad, really.

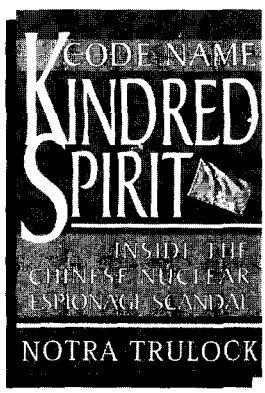
None of this, to put it mildly, is news. Twenty-five years ago Charles Fecher, a keeper of the Mencken flame, unwittingly revealed the shallowness of his idol's mind in *Mencken: A Study of His Thought*. Revelations of Mencken's anti-Semitism surfaced soon afterwards. And yet conservatives keep returning to the sage's shrine. The persistence of the pilgrimage to this deeply unworthy master merely exposes the impoverishment of the political culture of contemporary conservatism: its tendency to mistake prejudices for ideas, its straining to locate antecedents with even a modicum of style and wit.

Mencken's most recent conservative devotee is Terry Teachout, who is convinced—now more than ever—that the Sage of Baltimore has something to say to us. The decline of New Deal liberalism and the renewed legitimacy of conservative thought, he believes, have readied Mencken for resurrection. "It took longer than he expected, but times have indeed changed," Teachout observes. "Mencken's social and political views, long thought irreversibly outdated, have become a resurgent strain in American thought. Like it or not, the Mencken *Weltanschauung* is once again a force to be reckoned with, and written about." Earlier chroniclers of Mencken were mostly liberals who were embarrassed by or openly dismissive of Mencken's political and social ideas. But not Teachout: "Unlike Mencken's previous biographers, I write, very broadly speaking, from his point of view," he remarks. "I have not hesitated to be critical when I thought it appropriate, though I have also sought to place my criticism—particularly as regards his alleged anti-Semitism—in an appropriate historical context." Judging by this introductory promise, it looks as if we are in for a full-scale effort of rehabilitation.

The good news is that Teachout outwits himself, that he is too honest to succeed at rescuing Mencken from Mencken. Though he insists that Mencken was more than a mere comic stylist, that he sought to make a substantial contribution to American thought, in the end the biographer's hopes are defeated by the limitations of his subject. It seems that gradually he came to suspect that if Mencken's views really did become a "resurgent strain" in American culture, we could be in a hell of a mess. Teachout frequently finds himself making damaging admissions about this man whose worldview is supposedly ready for—and worthy of—renovation. By the time Teachout has assembled the abundant evidence of Mencken's anti-Semitism, for example, the malady is far more than merely "alleged." It is undeniable, and "historical context" does nothing to mitigate it. The historical context, after all, was the rise of Nazism and the war against Hitler.

Then there is the problem of Mencken's lack of curiosity—a fatal flaw, one would think, in anyone who sets out to be a "reviewer of ideas." Teachout admits that modernist art and literature were simply lost on Mencken, and that his failure to see anything of value in such writers as Henry James or James Joyce revealed a self-assurance recalling "the philistinism of his father, the bourgeois burgher from Southwest Baltimore who knew what he liked and liked what he knew." When Mencken turned his attention from reviewing literature ("he wrote amusingly about books of no importance") to reviewing ideas, Teachout admits, "the deeper waters in which he had started to swim were over his head."

Before the end of the book Mencken has



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drowned, and Teachout has abandoned any effort to rehabilitate his erstwhile hero as a thinker for our time. Concluding that Mencken was "something more than a memorable stylist, and something less than a wise man," he traces this absence of wisdom to "a fundamental inadequacy in Mencken's thought: a skepticism so extreme as to issue in philosophical incoherence." Yet Teachout's own account suggests a different conclusion: that Mencken's chief shortcoming was not his disbelief in received opinions, but his inability to question his own opinions; not incoherence, but rigidity. His skepticism was highly selective, and often little more than a pose. In Mencken's politics of style, the Nietzschean nihilist cohabited comfortably with the proper bourgeois. (Equally strange alliances emerged in postmodern conservative politics during the recent era of hip capitalism.) The key to this co-existence of contradictions was Mencken's own intellectual laziness—his refusal to examine his assumptions for half a century. Not a great track record for a sage.

H. L. Mencken by Jack Coughlin for The New Republic

II.

LIKE OTHER German immigrants in Baltimore and elsewhere, the Menckens arrived in the United States during and after the revolutions of 1848. But Mencken's grandfather, Burkhardt Mencken, left Dresden for Baltimore "not to embrace the boons of democracy in this great Republic, but to escape a threatened overdose of it at home." Or so the grandson later claimed, providing his own fear of the mob with some ancestral legitimacy but probably not exaggerating much.

Three generations of Menckens distrusted socialists, social democrats, and egalitarian do-gooders of all kinds. Henry's father August, a self-made cigar manufacturer, divided "all mankind ... [into] two great races: those who paid their bills, and those who didn't. The former were virtuous, despite any evidence that could be adduced to the contrary; the latter were unanimously and incurably scoundrels." No wonder Mencken described his childhood as a "larval state" within the cocoon of the complacent bourgeoisie.

Complacency did not preclude literacy. Born in 1880, young Henry grew up surrounded by the monuments of every late-Victorian library: Thackeray, Addison, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Howells, Swinburne, Kipling (who inspired the boy's first bad poetry), and the freethinking Thomas Henry Huxley, Darwin's defender, whom Mencken declared in retrospect to be "the greatest Englishman of the nineteenth century—perhaps the greatest Englishman of all time." But to a boy mesmerized by the smell of printer's ink, no one could equal the example of Mark Twain. Reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mencken recalled with characteristic hyperbole, was "probably the most stupendous event of my whole life." Twain became Mencken's model: a working reporter with a vigorous vernacular style. Yet while Mencken may have captured some of the rhythms of Mark Twain's "racy prose," as Teachout puts it, he never caught the Missourian's empathetic feel for the common life. Twain sympathized with ordinary folk even as he satirized their foolishness, but Mencken merely dismissed them.

Where he picked up this sense of his own superiority is something of a mystery. Maybe his mental alertness set him apart from the typical students at the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute. Certainly his ambition to write collided with paternal expectation. His father had nothing more exalted planned for him than a life in the family cigar business, but August Mencken's death in 1898 (at the age of forty-five) freed Henry from that fate. At eighteen, he presented himself in the city room of the *Morning Herald*, and after showing up every day for four weeks he was finally assigned to write a paragraph on an unsolved stable robbery. Teachout records that he went on to "an unbroken string of triumphs" in the newspaper trade. Like many of his contemporaries, from Richard Harding Davis to Stephen Crane, Mencken embraced newspaper reporting as an opportunity to immerse himself in unmediated experience. In his daily assignments, "the heavy reading of my teens had been replaced by life itself ... if I neglected the humanities I was meanwhile laying in all the worldly wisdom of a police lieutenant, a bartender, a shyster lawyer, or a midwife." This was the world that Dreiser would unveil in his novels, the world of drunks and prostitutes and tapped-out gamblers, of furtive backstairs pleasures and pointless barroom brawls. Like Dreiser, Mencken had an eye for the telling details of "life itself" and an incapacity to think seriously about what they told.

Yet his writing was vivid enough to win him his own column within just a couple of years. "Baltimore and the Rest of the World" gave him an opportunity to sharpen his style on subjects soon familiar to his readers: crooked politicians, easily purchased reporters, and inept versifiers; Christian Science; circus

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slang; and William Jennings Bryan, who was already acquiring a reputation (at least in Mencken's mind) as a spokesman for rural losers. Mencken's worldview was clicking into place. What sealed its political side, according to Teachout, was his promotion to city editor of the *Herald* in 1903. Mencken recalled the experience in 1925. "I inherited a bias against the rabble," he wrote, and grew up "full of suspicions of democratic sentimentality. As I came to manhood and began to deal with men myself, I noticed quickly that the failures were all incompetents—that God had marked them for the ditch, not man.... I had to struggle daily against the incompetence of men full of gabble about their sacred rights. They were stupid and lazy, and I was a better man than any of them, and on all counts."

MENCKEN'S CONVICTION OF his own superiority became the core of his political creed. Listening with mounting impatience to the whining of drunken reporters, he soon formulated an irritable individualist outlook that Teachout calls "social Darwinism in shirtsleeves." When the *Herald* folded and Mencken moved to the *Sun* in 1906, he carried this ideological baggage with him. Soon he stumbled onto Nietzsche, only a few of whose works had been translated into English. Mencken labored at learning German and read enough in the original to produce *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* in 1908. The book presented that elusive and difficult thinker as "a world-improving, can-do go-getter delighted to have seen through the fraud of Christianity and gone beyond good and evil," in Teachout's words. In Nietzsche, Mencken found what he thought was philosophical legitimation for his own outlook, which up to then had been based mostly on social prejudice and self-regard. Here at last was a philosopher who acknowledged the primacy of "the civilized minority," and even (Mencken thought) imagined that society could be re-organized to recognize and to enhance the power of the superior person. Here at last, to Mencken, was an explanation of his own discomfort amid the common herd: he was an *Übermensch*! One imagines the college sophomore's comparable self-discovery, sometime after midnight in his dorm room.

As a superior person, Mencken assumed he had a license for the sweeping dismissal of "most human beings." He summarized his beliefs in 1943: "The existence of most human beings is of absolutely no significance to history or human progress. They live and die as anonymously and as nearly uselessly as so many bullfrogs or houseflies. They are, at best, undifferentiated slaves upon an assembly line, and at worst they are robots who leave their mark upon time only by occasionally falling into the machinery, and so incommoding their betters." But like other social Darwinists (then and now), Mencken equated Darwinian evolution with human progress. There was no warrant for this delusion in Darwin—or in Nietzsche, for that matter; but even the supposedly skeptical Mencken entertained it as a possibility. "Like Nietzsche, I console myself with the hope that I am the man of the future, emancipated from the prevailing delusions and superstitions, and gone beyond nationalism."

AS PROGRESSIVE VISIONS go, this stuff might have been benign enough—if the part about nationalism had been true. But throughout his career Mencken remained committed to his own breed of German nationalism. It embittered him (with abundant justification) against the superpatriots who bullied Germanophiles during World War I; it also prevented him from ever seeing the true significance of Hitler. Its locus classicus, according to Teachout, was Mencken's "The Mailed Fist and Its Prophet," which appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* in November 1914. A celebration of the Nietzschean New Germany that was allegedly emerging under Kaiser Wilhelm II, the article elucidated views that Mencken held all his life but never expressed so openly again. The essay contained Mencken's parallel discoveries of his own Anglophobia and his dawning German "race-consciousness." Exalting *Kultur* over Puritanism, Mencken hailed the conquering supermen of the Wilhelmine state, the "superbly efficient ruling caste" presiding over a social order that embodied his utopian ideal: liberty for the select few, authoritarian control for the rest. This vision never wavered; Mencken never made his peace with democracy.

His experience during World War I only confirmed his disdain for the manipulable masses. Rampant Germanophobia was genuine; xenophobic thugs were on the prowl. Mencken had no interest in provoking them directly. As Teachout observes, Mencken "valued his creature comforts too much to dodge the rocks of the mob." He prudently gave up his daily column in the *Sun* and retreated to his study to work on *A Book of Prefaces* and *In Defense of Women*—the latter a celebration of Woman as balm for the busy man. It was also during the war that he and George Jean Nathan took over the

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moribund magazine *The Smart Set* and turned to the merchandising of chic, writing clever reviews about mostly unimportant books.

But even after he returned to daily journalism in 1920, Mencken remained restless within the literary limitations of *The Smart Set*. "He wanted to edit a journal of *ideas*," says Teachout, "and that *The Smart Set* could never be." Mencken began to plan his own magazine, which appeared as *The American Mercury* in 1924. He and Nathan parted bitterly and barely spoke to each other again. The divorce was typical of Mencken's friendships: "When any one for any reason offends me," he said, "I simply purge them from my list of acquaintances and give them no more thought." The superior man had no need to cultivate forgiveness, or to seek it.

Nathan thought that Mencken's move from *The Smart Set* to *The American Mercury* was a move from literature to politics. He was right, but only if one defines politics largely as a matter of taste. "In politics it will be, in the main, Tory," Mencken told Upton Sinclair, "but *civilized* Tory." *The American Mercury* gave Mencken's politics of style its fullest expression at an optimal historical moment: a time of complacent business triumphalism ("the New Era") and hypocritical public moralism. There were plenty of perfectly ridiculous people scurrying about, from Ku Kluxers and fundamentalists to Christian Scientists and Rotarians, demanding attention from satirists and parodists. Mencken stepped up to the plate. He became the Tom Wolfe of his day, skewering the pretenses of the earnest, the intellectual, the badly dressed.

Ultimately Mencken's politics of style were as superficial and unsatisfying as Wolfe's. But Mencken's prose was often quite engaging, and his targets—at least some of the time—were very deserving. Consider his assault on "Puritanism." The word was historically misleading, the real Puritans having been lusty hands at drink and copulation, and it was sloppily deployed. Still, no one could deny that, with the passage of the Volstead Act and the coming of Prohibition, a puritanical morality had acquired the unprecedented backing of federal government force. This was the period, after all, when one could not get a legal drink from sea to shining sea (though Maryland and New York, to their everlasting credit, never passed any legislation to enforce the Volstead Act). When "Puritan" meant "Prohibitionist," Mencken's libertarian scorn was richly justified.

Yet Mencken's crusade against Puritanism was at once too timid and too arrogant. He celebrated novelists whom he thought were victimized or undervalued by guardians of gentility—Dreiser and Upton Sinclair, Willa Cather and Sinclair Lewis. But he remained inert to the appeal of the entirety of the modernist canon, from Dostoevsky and Proust to Joyce and Woolf. *Ulysses* was "deliberately mystifying and mainly puerile," he thought. "I have never been able to get over the suspicion that Joyce concocted it as a kind of vengeful hoax." The problem is not that he failed to pay homage to certain now-canonical writers (modernism is not without its own dogmas and rigidities), but that he simply refused to engage with this literature at all—just as he ignored other forms of cultural ferment in the 1920s. He thought that jazz was "crude and childish" and modern dance a pointless charade. Of Duncan's dancing, he wrote that "its meaning, at bottom, was exactly that of any other dancing, which is to say it had scarcely any meaning at all."

Mencken wore his prejudices proudly. The same man who railed against "the general smugness and lack of intellectual enterprise that pervades American journalism" eventually came to embody a certain smugness and lack of enterprise himself. Within a few years *The American Mercury* had lost its sense of intellectual excitement. Mencken's interests had narrowed and, under his heavy editorial hand, every contributor sounded like him.

MENCKEN'S TIMIDITY TOWARD the avant-garde was matched by his arrogance toward rural tradition. *The American Mercury*'s disdain for the myth of the virtuous yeoman, along with its "single-voiced consistency," may have accounted for its popularity on college campuses. "The undergraduates must have their gods," *The Daily Iowan* observed in 1924, and Mencken was one of them. The desire to feel superior to the poor yokels back home has always posed a strong temptation to young people who have just left the provinces and are hoping to enter a wider world. Mencken had no such excuse. His contempt for the farm folk was boundless and deep; it turned his criticism into caricature. He directed his rage at many targets, but he brought it to white heat when he focused on William Jennings Bryan—the Great Commoner, and to Mencken the personification of the ignorant rural mob.

Mencken's hatred for Bryan led him to some revealing excesses. In 1926, the Scopes trial seemed to Mencken an opportunity to nail the Great Commoner for good. A Tennessee high school teacher named John Scopes was being prosecuted for breaking a new state law against teaching evolutionary theory. Mencken had no interest in Scopes, except as an ideological weapon. He suggested that the ACLU deliberately "sacrifice" the teacher and " 'use the case to make Tennessee forever infamous' by luring Bryan onto the witness stand 'to make him state his barbaric credo in plain English and to make a monkey of him before the world.' " This is pretty much what happened: Bryan indeed took the stand and revealed his beliefs in all their rigid literalism. Then he died before he could make his concluding statement to the jury. Scopes was convicted of a misdemeanor. The trial entered liberal mythology as a heroic battle for enlightenment.

But a closer look at the conflict between Mencken and Bryan reveals a struggle more subtle than a war between light and darkness. It was a clash between two dogmas, and Mencken's social Darwinism was the less humane of the two. His belief that the ideal of "the survival of the fittest" could be implemented in human affairs amounted to a warrant for eugenics and might well have sanctioned the systematic extermination of the "unfit." Bryan had been attacking the nihilistic implications of social Darwinism, correctly identifying that creed as "the law of hate—the merciless law by which the strong crowd out and kill off the weak." This was the criticism that was contained in his concluding statement, which was published posthumously. It does not justify legislation against the teaching of Darwinism, but it does suggest that Bryan was something more than a stupid fundamentalist stooge. Indeed, Bryan understood a key distinction that Mencken missed—even though his idol Huxley had been one of the first to make it. In his classic essay "Evolution and Ethics," Huxley had insisted that the power of evolutionary theory as a scientific explanation did not make it a suitable basis for making moral judgments and organizing human societies. Bryan, despite his ignorance, avoided this terrible category mistake. Mencken embraced it fervidly.

III.

AS PURITANISM WANED, the Great Depression spread and world war again loomed, and it was harder to praise Mencken for his "leadership of dissent," as Edmund Wilson had done in 1925. Mencken himself still believed he was a dangerous rogue, skewering "The Uplift" at every turn. Yet as a *New Yorker* contributor observed in reviewing his *Treatise on Right and Wrong*

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in 1934, "One is puzzled to note that the author refers to his treatise as this 'present ribald book.' I wager it would not bring the mildest flush to the cheek of a Radcliffe junior." As Mencken's cultural outlook began to seem predictable, his prose style became mannered and his politics ethically obtuse. Amid the mass poverty of the slump of the 1930s, Mencken continued to articulate his libertarian aphorisms, attacking "the vast army of parasites" created by the New Deal and insisting that the only lesson to be learned from the Depression was "the massive fact that hard thrift and not gambler's luck is the only true basis of national wealth." One could imbibe the same bromides in *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Mencken's opposition to labor unions on abstract contractualist grounds revealed the underlying brittleness of his thought. He simply could not see how unequal power complicated the contractual relationship between employer and employee. Complaining about the *Sun*'s New Deal sympathies, he argued that the newspaper "cannot protest when striking workers are deprived of the right of free assemblage and remain quiet when violent [pro-union] legislation impairs the inviolability of contract. It cannot denounce one man for robbing the government and stand by silently when another man is robbed by the government." His principled libertarianism remained constrained by the prejudices of his caste.

Among the most prominent of those prejudices was his anti-Semitism, which Teachout documents in detail, concluding laboriously: "that he was an anti-Semite cannot now reasonably be denied." Or even unreasonably: the record is repellent, even within the context of Mencken's less determinedly tolerant era. Though he thought Jews "inherently incapable of civilization," some of his best friends (of course) were Jewish, including Nathan and Alfred Knopf. Mencken was at first put off when he thought Knopf displayed "the obnoxious tactlessness of his race," but eventually he realized that Knopf was a *German* Jew and indeed (according to Teachout) "something of a social anti-Semite." By 1946, Mencken was relieved to learn that Knopf "realizes himself that there are now too many Jews in his office."

Note the date of that odious remark. Despite Nazism, the Holocaust, and the war, Mencken's anti-Semitism was as durable as all his other prejudices, whether or not they masqueraded as "ideas." Mencken's willful blindness to the Nazi evil put him in the company of home grown fascist ideologues. When Hitler rose to power and began systematically persecuting Jews, Mencken disingenuously worried that "professional kikes" would only strengthen Hitler's hand by provoking more anti-Semitism. The plain fact of the matter, he claimed, was that Nazism was a response to the rising Jewish influence in German culture—the replacement of "German ideas" by "Jewish ideas."

The problem is not simply that Mencken said those words at all, but that he said them in 1945. His Germanophilia combined with his hatred of Franklin Roosevelt to prevent him from learning anything from World War II. Indeed, he summed up the war with his characteristic combination of self-assurance and detachment: "I find it difficult to work up any regret for the heroes butchered in World War II. Anyone silly enough to believe in such transparent quacks as Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill leaves the world little the loser by departing from it." Anyone obtuse enough to make such a statement deserves a healthy dose of scorn. Given Mencken's pronouncements, it hardly seems a "horrendous irony" (as Teachout claims) that *The American Mercury* finally passed into the hands of "a series of anti-Semitic cranks."

Mencken's most honorable conduct involved his stoical endurance of pain in private life. He married Sara Haardt in 1930, when he was middle-aged, knowing that she was about to confront a climactic struggle with tuberculosis. He devotedly nursed her through increasingly frequent bouts of serious sickness, until she died in 1935. He also bore the long and degrading aftermath of a stroke with resignation and humor (along with occasional fits of rage). The situation created an ironic coda for a social Darwinist's life. Even an *Übermensch* is at the mercy of his arteries, and Mencken endured his affliction with remarkable grace.

Yet finally it is necessary to return to the public man. It was in public, after all, that Mencken made his reputation, and in public (if anywhere) where he will be resuscitated. But don't hold your breath. If even his admiring biographer is finally unable to take the man as seriously as he had set out to do, if the attempt at rehabilitation produces mostly disappointment, then the rest of us can only reach a chastened conclusion: most of the time the legendary H. L. Mencken was not much more than a wise-ass, a sophomore posing as a sage. It's a little sad, really. ■

Hell and High Water

By DAVID THOMSON

A Third Face: My Tale of Writing, Fighting, and Filmmaking by Samuel Fuller with Christa Lang Fuller and Jerome Henry Rudes

(Alfred A. Knopf, 592 pp., $35)

SAM FULLER WAS placed for all time with his appearance in Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le Fou*. There he is, a scruffy American in Paris, profoundly unimpressed by it all, drinking vodka, wearing dark glasses indoors, and taking the chic, half-naked women for granted. Jean-Paul Belmondo tries talking to him, and one of the women serves as a translator. Belmondo discovers that the American is a film director, in Paris to do Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*, which even then, in 1965, was an unlikely hope. The shades left one wondering whether Fuller was supposed to be blind. What other condition could be so suited to his runic announcements?

So what is cinema? asks Belmondo. And Fuller's rasping voice answers in English, without hesitation. He could have been born in possession of this uncompromising definition. "The film is like a battleground. Love ... Hate ... Action ... Violence ... Death. In one word—Emotion." And now he tells us in

DAVID THOMSON's *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film* has just been published by Knopf.

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his autobiography that "I'd be rich if I had a nickel for every film magazine and festival program around the world who printed that goddamned line!" Maybe it was the first time in his life that he was less his own man than the graven image of "Sam Fuller," the cigar doing the talking.

The French had seized on Fuller years before. He was exactly their kind of noble savage, a B-picture Baudelaire, a rogue genius roaming the open prison known as America. Americans, in turn, have picked up on that famously wild energy. You can feel that romance with bravura, yarn-spinning panache in the way this book was recently reviewed in *The New York Times*, under the headline "A Ripsnorting Life Gets a Ripsnorting Memoir": the Fuller cliché exactly, the image that little Sammy Fuller was always so busy promoting of himself, with a six-gun in his hand, a cigar as fat as a missile in his mouth, and his head burning with sensationalism. Surely there was such a guy: tiny, snarly, self-made, a rock of mad honesty, as aggressively sentimental as Al Jolson, someone who said "Hell!" all the time and tried to give you the impression that just being with him was like trying to defend yourself against Marciano. He was the stoker for his own furnace, building a heat from which his protagonists burst out roaring, desperate, exultant—the naked, forked, and scorched animal.

When the young French critics went to the movies, they saw that and more—they beheld a kind of pulp fiction that tasted like caviar. They knew immediately that the life and the marvel of the man existed up there on the screen, and in its surging shapes. Lacking the English that might make them cringe at Fuller's dialogue, they had more reason to see the style. Here is Truffaut, reacting in 1958 to the picture *Verboten*: "Bom ... bom ... bom ... bomm. Bom ... bom ... bom ... bomm. To the strains of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, four or five American soldiers liberate a German village with nothing but hand weapons. Ludwig von Fuller, who doesn't fool around when he's making movies, gives us the illusion that we're watching the entire American army. A wounded GI cared for by a young German girl, Helga—an idyllic touch, love, Wagner takes over for Beethoven. Samuel Fuller, who handles his camera with great style, takes his forbidden lovers on a honeymoon on the Rhine that is straight out of Guillaume Apollinaire."

Or how about this, which is Godard again at *Forty Guns* (1957):

> Barbara Stanwyck's brother grabs her to use her as a shield. "Go on, shoot, you dirty coward," he shouts to Barry Sullivan, who is covering them with his gun. And without hesitation Barry Sullivan calmly shoots Barbara Stanwyck, who crumples up, and then the brother, who falls mortally wounded in his turn. "Stop shooting, you dirty coward," cries the dying man—Bang! Bang!—"For pity's sake, stop shooting"—Bang! Bang!—"Stop shooting, you can see I'm dying"—Bang! Bang! Bang!

So it was Kiss Kiss Bang Bang—to recall the movie poster that gave a title to Pauline Kael's first collection, and Pauline was a fine moll for Sammy, a broad made on his petite scale, gasping in orgasm and outrage at the way his trashy thinking was embodied in one of the great camera styles of American film. She would have been well aware of the dangers that loomed when an instinct like Fuller's began to read and absorb his best reviews. And it is still wiser to trust the upheaval of the films than Fuller's soothing report of his own life.

ON THE ONE HAND I can only urge you to get yourself to a video store, find *I Shot Jesse James* (1948), and realize that for his debut Fuller was maverick enough to want to make Bob Ford his hero; or *Park Row* (1952), which is his tribute to his beloved newspaper business, and the marker for his ceaseless debt to the poetry of headlines; or *Pickup on South Street* (1952)—which only won the Bronze Lion at the Venice Film Festival, howdya like that?; or *House of Bamboo* (1955), a straight masterpiece, with Robert Ryan having to kill the hood he loved, while murmuring, "You see it now, don't you, Griff?" to the corpse; or *Run of the Arrow* (1956), still the only American film that puts out the authentic Irish Confederate Comanche point of view; or *China Gate* (1957), with Angie Dickinson as Lucky Legs, and the legs sometimes sprawled across the great CinemaScope frame; or *Forty Guns* (1957); *Verboten* (1958); *The Crimson Kimono* (1959); *Underworld USA* (1960); *Merrill's Marauders* (1961); *Shock Corridor* (1963); *The Naked Kiss* (1963).

Between 1948 and 1963, in an age of alleged conservatism and anxiety in America, and of diminishing confidence in Hollywood, little Sam Fuller made over a dozen films (I have omitted some titles) that are as rabid, hungry, lean, and dangerous as a pack of wolves (and please don't tell me that wolves are actually misunderstood and wronged in legend et cetera—I mean *wolves!*, as in headline talk). Not one of those Fuller films was nominated for an Oscar. Not many of them were truly A pictures. *Pickup on South Street* runs only eighty minutes. They are movies about scumbags, hookers, thugs, molls, and mothers. And they constitute one of the punchiest bodies of work in American film. You have to see them—I mean really see them, in the full dark, clotted by the breath of strangers, on screens about the size of wrecked ships never likely to hit the real swell again.

THE BEST BOOK I know about Fuller was written by Nicholas Garnham and published in 1971. On the first page, Garnham owns up to his own passion, and the shabby, antique circumstances that created it—the passage is worth quoting, because such circumstances are so much harder to find now, and because if you haven't had to confront Angie Dickinson's legs as long as a school bus, you are reduced to the rather vague and shriveled eroticism of the VCR:

> This book is a labor of love, a love born in the dark womb of Sunday afternoon moviehouses in rain-drenched provincial towns and the seedier areas of London. This book is the culmination of an odyssey whose islands are ancient cinemas named Rex, Imperial, Tolmer, whose sirens are named Fuller, Boetticher, Siegel, Ray, Mann and Aldrich. To see in those half-empty moviehouses, smelling of damp clothes and nicotine, above the heads of sheltering old-age pensioners the images of *House of Bamboo*, *Pickup on South Street* or *Merrill's Marauders* was to come face to face with a cinematic presence that demanded recognition.

Just as those London theaters are gone or gentrified, just as nicotine is now the outlaw of the age, so it would be hard today to find acceptable prints of Fuller's great works in their original aspect ratio. I mean as movies. VHS and DVD are the best chances for those films surviving, so long as we concede how tamed or reduced survival has become. The wolves are now Labrador retrievers. It's not that the seething dynamism in Fuller—the slamming close-ups, the shifting composition, the delirious tracking shots, and the concussions of editing—is missing on the small screen. You can see the effects, lined up like academic proofs. It's just that you no longer feel them, because the emotion of the film was always dependent on the size and the impact of the motion on the screen. Samuel Fuller remains a filmmaker as energized as Franz Kline, as doomy as Jim Thompson, as soaring and

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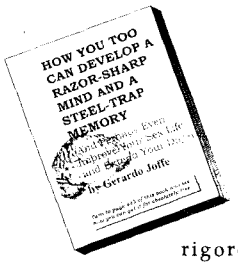

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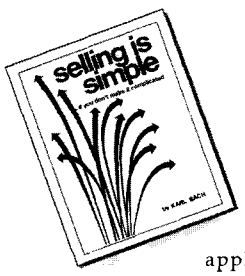

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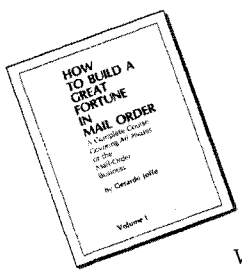

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bitter as Charlie Parker. For whichever post-war explosion you relate Fuller to, you have to see the films and hear the hardmouth talk alongside the intimations of music. In Fuller's bursting 1950s, movie was a visual/dramatic/radio art. It was a frenzy on the wall, and the clamor of suggestive sounds in the dark.

ALL OF WHICH is absolutely vital if we are to forgive this well-intentioned, informative, but eventually misleading book about Sam Fuller. Fuller was born in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1911, the son of a Polish-Jewish mother and a Russian-Jewish father who had thrown out the Rabinovitch name (and Jewish training) and picked an alternative from the roster on the *Mayflower*. It is striking, therefore, that Fuller the autobiographer seizes on his own blunt, straightforward ways: "I come from a generation for whom telling the truth meant everything. I suppose I'm still pretty naïve about people being truthful. See, I still believe what James Cagney said in one of his movies: 'You shake a man's hand and look him straight in the eye and everything will be all right.'" See. That's the key to the style. On screen, Sam is always saying "See!" and showing us. On the page, it's too often lecture.

Five hundred pages later, the story of this seething little life comes to its close. Along the way, Fuller has said "Hell!" or "Helluva!" so many times to hammer home his simple sincerity that the reader is punch-drunk (and a hundred percent unconvinced). Still, the book ends with very much the kind of protesting language that frequently makes Fuller's dialogue a struggle between tolerance and derision:

> So here's my last word, dear reader.
> Love.
> That's right. Love.
> I don't give a damn if it sounds like some corny ending to a B movie. Everybody's got troubles, setbacks, frustrations, tragedies. Love gets us through them. Love inspires generosity, patience and compassion. Love keeps us healthy and whole. If I've learned anything at all from writing all those stories, from fighting a world war, from making all those films, from being way up and being way down, I've learned that everything—everything!—can be expressed in just four god-blessed words: Love is the answer.

All together now? Let me say as gently as I can that this is the fond blather of an old man, probably much in love with a younger wife (the actress Christa Lang), but a million miles from the harsh worldview of such unforgettable characters as Skip (Richard Widmark), the pickpocket who knows no allegiances in the McCarthyist world of *Pickup on South Street*; O'Meara (Rod Steiger) the essential rebel and misanthrope in *Run of the Arrow*; Tolly (Cliff Robertson), the heartless seeker of insane personal vengeance in *Underworld USA*; or Kelly (Constance Towers), the prostitute in *The Naked Kiss*.

These characters, and all of Fuller's most characteristic people, are outsiders, on the brink of insanity, exhausted by vast, absurd ordeals and talking like emotional drunks. To quote the French critic Luc Moullet:

> Fuller is a coarse character: everything he does is incongruous. There is a grain of madness in him. But we really need madmen.... Only the insane can hope one day to create a work comparable to the living model. In Fuller we see everything that other directors deliberately excuse from their films: disorder, filth, the unexplainable, the stubbled chin, a kind of fascinating ugliness in a man's face.... Man belongs to the order of the earth, and he must resemble it, in all the harshness of its beauty.

That is brilliant, until you think of Fuller reading it and having to get his cunning head around the idea of his own insanity. So it is unduly sane, genteel, or elderly to talk so much about love when life has been so tough. The Sam Fuller I met, in the early 1980s, was already his own parody, not just garrulous but barking out his own dialogue and carrying on as if he were in a film—and this was long after his best work. He was idolized by then, he was a legendary character—none of which is especially good for primitives. But even then I don't think anyone ever doubted that Fuller, personally, was dangerous, unruly, a force, in the way that some small men never lose. Nor for one moment do I think that Rabinovitch became Fuller tidily and that was that.

Education gets barely a mention in this book, and when it does come up it's as a place where Sammy got into fights. Soon, as you know, he was working—why not, he was a youth in the Depression—as a hotel bellboy and then as a beginner, loading papers for the *New York Journal*. How one longs for a reliable, searching commentary on those years. Yet Fuller the self-conscious dealer in truth covers childhood as quickly as a 1930s movie about Jimmy Cagney growing up to be a public enemy—and a live wire. It's not that the book is simply rose-colored or incomplete: it's a scenario already, a vivid dramatic sketch, typical of the kind of writing that supplies its own Pow!, Ouch!, and Chrissakes! By the standard of the 1930s, it is movie-writing for an age when disenchanted novelists had to work side by side with uninhibited purveyors of pulp.

FULLER BECAME A crime reporter for Arthur Brisbane at the *Journal*. "God, how I loved it!" The melodrama, the sordid lives, the celebrities seen in private, the privileged vantages, the chance to tell it all in two hundred words. Here's Sam at an Ossining execution: "Three powerful shocks hit the man's body like a runaway train. His body began to shake, his skin turned purple, then blue, and smoke started coming off his flesh. For Chrissakes, he actually started to burn right in front of our eyes! The odor of charred human flesh is something right out of hell." I'm sure he was there, but the writing is sheer journalese—hitting every cliché, so full of imagined sensation that Fuller can picture it with his eyes shut. And that is the great lesson of his film-making. For if he was a hack with words, when he had to bring an event to life he was like no one else. Suddenly the clichés fell apart and were replaced by extraordinary and unique camera movements, Capa and Weegee compositions and nearly surreal pieces of action. He had no training for that—he had gone to movies like every other kid of his age. And he never had the kind of mind that could analyze his own experience, thank God. Understanding can kill the vitality of a primitive.

Journalism also provided a rough-and-ready politics: a landscape of dumb, luckless bastards who could end up in the chair because they had never worked out how to survive. It gave Fuller a vein of populism and care for the underdog that went hand in glove with the yellow press's shameless exploitation of its gullible readers and ruthless endorsement of the status quo. But then those politics came to real life in the war, when Fuller was an ant in the infantry, desperate to survive and even more desperate to dress up his own fear as survivor's toughness. He loved his unit, the Big Red One (celebrated in one of his later films in which Lee Marvin has to be solemn to the point of being statuesque as an eternally reliable sergeant). Again, Fuller doesn't tell the whole truth of war: the panic, the madness, the frenzy to endure at any cost. But his eye was getting more precise. He went ashore early at Omaha Beach on June 6:

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The UN and Israel

Is the Jewish state getting a fair shake from the world body?

Several years ago, we published one of our clarifying messages under the heading of "The UN and the Middle East." In it, we described how the UN seems to be totally obsessed with Israel. Now, a few years later, it might be time to revisit the topic.

What are the facts?

An outcast: Israel is indeed an outcast in the United Nations and thus, by extension, a pariah in the whole world. Though founded in 1948 – over fifty years ago and at about the same time as many other countries in the wake of World War II – its "legitimacy," its "right to exist," are still being questioned and a topic of constant debate in the UN.

Following the 1967 Six-Day War, the hostility of the United Nations against Israel expanded out of all bounds. Between 1967 and 1988, the UN Security Council passed 88 Resolutions against Israel and the UN General Assembly passed more than 400.

In 1974, Yassir Arafat addressed the General Assembly with a holstered pistol on his hip and received a standing ovation by that body. The hostility against Israel reached its peak in 1975, when the General Assembly passed Resolution 3379 declaring "Zionism as a form of racism." This infamous Resolution remained in effect for sixteen years when, under intense pressure from the United States, it was finally repealed.

> "Instead of condemning and hating Israel, [the underdeveloped countries] should take it as an example of how to build an advanced, prosperous and competent nation."

What is the reason for the collective hostility of the UN against Israel? All of this hostility is based on the very structure of the United Nations. In the General Assembly, 130 of the 190 members will always, automatically, vote against Israel. The inner circle of this hatred is the core of twenty Arab nations, which initiates the harshest condemnations of Israel. Those countries are part of the larger 56-member Muslim group, which can reliably be counted on automatically to join the Arab block in their anti-Israel Resolutions. And those countries are almost always joined by the "non-aligned" group, which are essentially the underdeveloped countries of the world. They have little interest in Israel, but they are united in their hatred of the United States and consider Israel its surrogate. Each country in the General Assembly counts the same. The vote of the United States counts the same as that of, say, Rwanda or the Ivory Coast.

The greatest outrage is that of the 190 members of the UN, Israel, not being a full member of any of the "regional groups," is the only country that cannot be a member of the Security Council, the most important body of the UN. Syria, deservedly classified as a terrorist state, has just been elected to a 2-year term on that Council. Such outlaw countries as Libya, Iran, North Korea, and even Saddam Hussein's Iraq are eligible for membership. Israel is not.

The most virulent center of anti-Israel activities within the UN. The Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) has classified Israel as the principal human rights violator in the world today. Since its inception, about 25% of its Resolutions have condemned Israel. Such egregious human rights violations as those of China in Tibet, or of Russia in Chechnya don't even come to the floor for discussion. The genocide in Rwanda, the ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia, the horrifying "communal strife" in Indonesia's East Timor, the "disappearance" of a few hundred thousand refugees in the Congo, and the ruthless rampage of the Sudanese Muslims against the Christians are not found worthy of the attention of the Human Rights Commission.

Such outlandish canards as the "blood libel," that Jews use the blood of Muslims and Christians for the baking of their Passover matzos or of the Israelis injecting Arab children with the AIDS virus are earnestly discussed in that forum.

Finally, there is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) which was established in 1949 to assist the Palestinian "refugees" created by the Arabs' attempt to destroy Israel at its birth. For more than 50 years, UNRWA has fully funded and essentially administers the so-called "refugee camps" – hotbeds of murderous anti-Israel activity, including the notorious camp in Jenin, which is the source of most of the suicide bombers who have so far killed over six hundred Israeli civilians and wounded thousands more.

Obviously, the pressure that the Arabs and other Muslim countries are able to exert because of their disproportionate economic power is the main cause of the anti-Israelism (anti-Semitism) of the UN. But most disturbing is the participation and acquiescence in such activity on the part of many of the European nations which, by their actions or inaction, were complicit in the Holocaust. As to the underdeveloped nations of the world, all of which are represented in the General Assembly, one would hope that they would look to Israel as a country from which they could learn and that they would wish to emulate. Virtually all of the countries created after WWII, most of them in Africa, have regressed socially, politically, economically, and in virtually all other respects since freeing themselves from their colonial condition. Millions and millions have died in fratricidal wars. Millions have died of starvation and millions are condemned to die by famine and by AIDS. Instead of condemning and hating Israel, they should take it as an example of how to build an advanced, prosperous and competent nation.

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Wave upon wave of our soldiers hit that beach. Nothing could stop the massive invasion. Machine guns rattled from up above, dropping dogfaces in the surf, turning the ocean red. Human screams were drowned out by the shrieking artillery shells that fell out of the foggy sky. Mines exploded underfoot. Smoldering bodies were everywhere. As thousands of dogfaces debarked, hundreds and hundreds dropped into the surf and across the sand. Heads, arms, fingers, testicles and legs were scattered everywhere as we ran up the beach, trying to dodge the corpses. I saw a man's mouth—just a mouth, for Chrissakes!—floating in the water.

In 1944, while he was in Europe, he had a novel called *The Dark Page* published. It was a real novel—though Fuller says next to nothing about its content in this book—as opposed to the pulps that he had done in the late 1930s (*Burn Baby Burn* and *Test Tube Baby*). Howard Hawks bought the rights to *The Dark Page* for $15,000, but never made the film. (He sold the rights at a big profit and it turned into a Phil Karlson picture, *Scandal Sheet*, made in 1952.) *The Dark Page* is the story of an intense and perverse relationship between a newspaper editor and a reporter, and it's an early sign of Fuller's fascination with betrayed friendships (a matter not raised in *A Third Face*).

BUT *THE DARK PAGE* helped to get Fuller closer to movies (he had done a few screenplays before the war), and in 1948 he did his first film, *I Shot Jesse James*, for Robert L. Lippert, a drive-in tycoon who also made B pictures. As if to ace Hawks, Fuller hired John Ireland, a small sensation in Hawks's *Red River*, but a wild guy who had crossed Hawks and was never forgiven. *I Shot Jesse James* is still one of the more startling Fuller films, a western filled with dark ideas about male affection and the need for fame. Martin Scorsese, whose own work is filled with male bonding that can turn rancid, recollects in the foreword to this book seeing *I Shot Jesse James* as a child and never forgetting the instant of hesitation before betrayal. It's a rare moment, one that offers a thematic entry to Fuller's material—yet something ignored in this book. Why should the intense artist think to betray himself?

Fuller had sneaked in as a director, in the last wave of B pictures, when no one had any reason to expect the stylist that he would become. And, more or less, his natural career lasted—at a fast and furious rate—until Hollywood began to change. The old studio system faltered. The great directors were hailed as geniuses by French critics. And then the generation of Scorsese tried to fill their shoes. In Britain in the early 1960s, I recall, there was a fierce critical debate (essentially liberal humanist cinema against cinema for cinema's sake) when the young rebels offered *Pickup on South Street* as an insolent rebuke to the intellectual anguish of Ingmar Bergman, Stanley Kubrick, and even David Lean. And it was not long after that that Fuller stood short and proud in the salon of Pierrot le Fou, issuing his ultimatum terms for the defense of movies.

Fuller was only fifty-three then, but he seemed older. B pictures were no more, and truly Fuller was a little embarrassed by the scale of A pictures. In 1965, he met the German actress Christa Lang, who would be his second wife and very much the protector of this book. Fuller took one festival tribute after another. He became the talisman of younger directors such as Scorsese, Peter Bogdanovich, Curtis Hanson, Jim Jarmusch, Wim Wenders, and Quentin Tarantino, all of whom were so movie literate that they might have produced about a quarter-cup of "primitive" if you had put them all in the same press. And so this book was written in years of old age and adulation, and surely helped into being by Fuller's widow and others.

He lived in Europe a lot. He toured festivals and did guest spots in the films of his young admirers. He did Fuller redux films: *White Dog*, where the wolf actually turns into a new Rin Tin Tin, and *The Big Red One*, his long-dreamed-of panorama of the infantry life. It's not bad, but if I tell you that instead of eighty-seven raw minutes slapped on the screen like a bloodstain he nursed dreams of a four-and-a-half-hour masterpiece, you will realize how Sam Fuller was turning into David Lean. And this book inevitably suffers from the benign, half-dozing dream of Fuller's prolonged celebrity. If only it could be as quick, tired, and direct as Thelma Ritter's Moe in her death scene from *Pickup on South Street*.

The limits and the omissions of the book are every bit as revealing of the real, awkward Fuller as what the book says. I should add that many of the pictures are superb: in the war section, it has Fuller's own pungent cartoons, some Robert Capa pictures (they were buddies), and Fuller's own snapshots—there is one, from a passing truck, of French girls in summer clothes that instantly captures his remote adoration of prettiness. And while the book certainly conveys Fuller's style as a scenarist, it offers no clue to his dynamic or hellish film-making. For that you must turn to the screen.

There is one last thing to be said, and it comes as wariness about the Fuller cult, especially as entertained by today's film intellectuals. Sam Fuller may not have cared to spell it out, or even face it himself, but he came to work as a director as a very wounded survivor—a little man oppressed by xenophobia, hard times, big bosses, the military, and all the corpses he had had to see. There is a spirit of outrage in Fuller's work, a roar of anguish at the world, and it is something we don't hear now. Today's directors have no politics. And so I don't think that it is accidental that Fuller reveled in the 1950s, an age in which so many political clichés were cracking open, and bugs were crawling out of the supposed fruit. The current revival of interest in Douglas Sirk, courtesy of Todd Haynes's *Far From Heaven*, only reminds us of a generation of brutalized idealists—men such as Nicholas Ray, Robert Aldrich, Otto Preminger, and Samuel Fuller. Fuller had known hell, and even if he regularly overdid Hell!, his films had a limping, warped hurt to them that you rarely find in our franchise-suckered times. ■

An Entrance

For Max

If you want to give thanks
the way Borges did
but this time not to the labyrinth
of cause and effect—
But to the plain
sweetness of a day
when everywhere you turn
there is an entrance—
When even the air is a door—
And your own child is a door
afloat on invisible hinges.
"The world is a house," he says,
over lunch as if to give you a clue.
And before the words dissolve
above his plate of eggs and rice
you suddenly see how we are in it—
And how everywhere the air
is holding hands with the air—
And how everyone is connected
to everyone else by simply breathing it.

Malena Mörling

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Turn, Turn, Turn

By Alan Ehrenhalt

Electoral Realignments: A Critique of an American Genre by David R. Mayhew

(Yale University Press, 174 pp., $24)

Every time we vote for president in this country, a silent conspiracy of candidates and journalists contrives to place a giant fork in the road right in front of us. We are always at a moment of crucial decision. Whatever choice we make, we will be setting the course of American politics for decades to come. Even the most seemingly uneventful campaigns—Ronald Reagan's effortless victory over Walter Mondale in 1984, for example—are routinely portrayed in apocalyptic terms while they are going on. That year, Mondale proclaimed himself to be "fighting for the future of America," Reagan talked of a collision between "two different visions of the future," and Newt Gingrich prophesied that the result would usher in a full generation of Republican dominance, much like William McKinley's victory over William Jennings Bryan had done in 1896.

It was all nonsense. Ronald Reagan's presidency was historically significant, but the 1984 election was not. By the time it was held, the most important events of the so-called Reagan revolution had already taken place. The voting that year told students of politics very little that they did not already know. Most elections are like that. Once they are over, we realize that there was no fork in the road. We were merely choosing to stay on the path that we were following, or at most opting for incremental change. The underlying realities of any political era—voter loyalties, regional preferences, party ideologies—are not that easy to dislodge.

Still, anyone who thinks about American politics has the sense that there are exceptions to the rule: truly critical elections that in one stroke alter the entire system and write new rules for the coming generation. There was 1860, when the Republican Party burst onto the national scene, captured the presidency, and won majorities in Congress that it was to keep for most of the next three decades. And there was 1932, when the nation's burgeoning urban ethnic electorate swung to the Democratic side, set in motion the New Deal, and established what came to seem like permanent Democratic control in Congress and in the states.

So there certainly are turning points in American politics. It is foolish to proclaim such a "defining moment" every four years, ignoring the plain evidence of history; but it seems equally foolish to dismiss such moments altogether. And over the years it has been a major preoccupation of political scientists to study the cycles of electoral history, to sift through the data and to find rules that separate the genuine turning-point elections, those that realign the political process, from the more common elections in which we simply meander along much as we had been doing before.

This is a task that has attracted some of the most distinguished election scholars of the past two generations: V. O. Key Jr., E. E. Schattschneider, James L. Sundquist, and Walter Dean Burnham. They read the election returns going back one hundred fifty years, looked for patterns, and (though they differed on some of the details) found patterns so similar and so striking that they at first seemed difficult to believe. The scholars found that not only do realigning elections occur in American politics, they occur with the regularity of a comet: every thirty-six years. The system of 1860, with its sequence of Republican victories in close presidential elections, yielded abruptly in 1896 to a cycle of much more pervasive Republican control, in which most of the elections were landslides and Democratic majorities in Congress were infrequent and brief. That system in turn gave way to the era of New Deal coalition strength, lasting through the Depression and World War II, and on into the 1950s and beyond.

Not only are the cycles regular, but the quirks are regular. In each thirty-six-year cycle, the minority party wins two of the nine elections (Grover Cleveland in 1884 and 1892; Woodrow Wilson in 1912 and 1916; Dwight Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956). Four years before the end of every cycle, there is an election that falls short of upsetting the balance but points the way to the new order that lies ahead. The classic example is Alfred E. Smith's Democratic candidacy of 1928, which failed nationally but broke through in New England and the cities of the industrial Northeast, prefiguring the Roosevelt victory four years later and those of Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson further down the road.

Realignment theory seems to have an almost Nostradamian neatness, but it has undeniable facts on its side. Of course, like any grand theory of cyclical history worthy of the name, it is marred by a few problems. Most conspicuously, there is the problem of 1968. That year, when Richard M. Nixon and Hubert H. Humphrey opposed each other for president, it had been thirty-six years since the last realignment. It was time for the wheel to spin again, bringing to an end a completed cycle of New Deal Democratic hegemony. And Nixon did defeat Humphrey—but at the other levels of the system nothing much happened. Congress remained in Democratic hands, as did most governorships and legislatures in most of the states around the country. Where was the realignment?

There are several ways to deal with this puzzle that preserve the grand theory in one form or another. One can argue that realignment began on schedule in 1968, but was cut short by unforeseen events. The cultural turmoil of the late 1960s was an upheaval in society powerful enough to signal an upheaval in politics. The defection of millions of Southern and big-city Democrats from their New Deal loyalties not only elected Nixon but also seemed to bring the electoral rules of the previous period to an abrupt end. Then, the argument goes, Watergate intervened. Instead of consolidating their power in Nixon's second presidential term, Republicans threw it away, consigning themselves to minority status in most of the political system for another two decades. This is the argument that Kevin P. Phillips made in the 1970s, following the success and then the apparent refutation of his book *The Emerging Republican Majority*, in which he confidently proclaimed in 1969 the arrival of a new GOP cycle in perfect consonance

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with the rules of the thirty-six-year cyclical theory.

Ultimately, however, this was not a very satisfying answer to the problem. Theories of history are supposed to be hardy enough to withstand the inevitable bumps in the road. To say that Watergate canceled the 1968 realignment sounded more like an excuse than an explanation. But there were other ideas. Burnham hypothesized that the growth of the realignment of 1968 had been stunted by forces within the political system itself—most notably by the decline of party identification among voters. Any partisan realignment depends on the decision of much of the electorate to give up one set of loyalties in exchange for another. If party loyalty itself had gone out of fashion, to be replaced by fickle preferences that shifted with each new sequence of candidates and commercials, then perhaps the cycle had been broken, and there was little point in arguing about when the next turning would take place.

Or perhaps realignment had not been canceled, just unavoidably detained. Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, it was impossible not to notice that Democratic control of Congress—and the party's one recent presidential victory in 1976—had been built on the residual voting habits of rural and small-town Southern Democrats whose overall view of the world should have planted them squarely on the Republican side. One day, scholars and political strategists seemed to agree, these Southerners would finally make their break with the past, and the New Deal political system would be gone—a few years behind schedule, perhaps, but gone nevertheless.

Then came the Republican landslide of 1994, creating GOP majorities in the Senate, the House, and most of the nation's governorships, and prompting a whole new round of intense realignment debate. Was this finally the arrival of the Republican era that Phillips had announced a full quarter-century earlier? Or was it a brand-new realignment in itself, replacing a fragile but more or less coherent political system that had lasted from 1968 to 1994, one that deserved to be treated as a short electoral era in itself? These are undeniably interesting issues. And they all have one element in common. They all maintain a belief in the outlines of the Grand Theory: that there are regular cycles in American politics, with sharp breaks between the rules and assumptions of one era and another, and that they can occur suddenly, in a single dramatic election year. It is not a matter of what, it is a matter of when.

WHAT NO ONE has done until now is raise the possibility that the theory itself is the problem—that realignment scholars are seeking a cyclical order that does not exist in the first place. This is the argument that David R. Mayhew makes in his lucidly argued and stimulating book. Drawing on earlier research by Jerome M. Clubb, William H. Flanigan, and Nancy Zingale, and on later work by Larry Bartels, Mayhew asks the commonsense questions that might have been asked a long time ago. What are the unmistakable characteristics of a realignment? How can we tell when we are in the middle of one? And how do we avoid mistaking an attractive but misleading detour for the genuine historical crossroads we are looking for?

The most obvious sign of realignment, Mayhew begins, would be a drastic reshuffling of votes in a single election year: a big surge in one party's presidential vote, a pronounced drop in the vote for the other party, or a widespread exchange of party loyalty, with one section of the country moving decisively into the Democratic column and another one migrating just as decisively toward the GOP. The Roosevelt-Hoover election of 1932 meets all these tests. The Democratic vote went up, the Republican vote went down, and the map of loyalties—urban and rural, north and south, black and white, Catholic and Protestant—had to be substantially re-drawn. 1932 is the prototypical realigning election against which all others can fairly be judged.

The problem is that the other elections long assumed to be critical examples of realignment do not really meet the standard. Lincoln's election in 1860, for example, is only modestly eventful as measured by votes alone. That can be explained away fairly easily: the Democratic Party split into four factions that year, and so the numbers are of dubious value, since no statistical analysis can capture adequately the turmoil that existed in the electorate as the Civil War was about to begin. Much more troublesome is what might be called the problem of 1896. The struggle that year between McKinley and Bryan is central to the entire realignment theory. Virtually all exponents of the theory have posited that McKinley's decisive victory that year, with the working class in the Northeastern cities repudiating Bryan's populism and opting for the gold standard and McKinley's corporate conservatism, established a political system that remained largely intact for a generation.

It is a plausible enough argument, bolstered by voluminous contemporary accounts documenting the sense of those who lived through the campaign that they were indeed involved in some sort of electoral apocalypse. It is also an argument without which the cyclical edifice collapses. 1896 was exactly halfway between 1860 and 1932. Any serious effort to demonstrate that electoral upheaval occurs once every generation has to place a fateful crossroads somewhere in that last decade of the nineteenth century.

The difficulty, as Mayhew points out, is that in statistical terms 1896 is a realignment flop. The Republican vote went up that year, but not overwhelmingly; the Democratic vote did not change much at all; and, taking into account the nation as a whole, there was no significant reshuffling of partisan loyalties. Going purely on the basis of statistics, there are plenty of unheralded, supposedly uneventful election years in the last century—such as 1868, 1876, and 1920—that meet the numbers test much better.

OF COURSE, IT may be that raw voting statistics are the wrong way to go about the inquiry. Electoral realignment may be too subtle and complex a phenomenon to be captured through the dogmatic procedures of number-crunching political science. Perhaps there is a more effective way to do it. Mayhew takes a few possible alternatives and gives them a reasonable hearing. It might be the case, for example, that the way to spot a realigning election is by looking for high turnout as a sign of intense voter interest and incipient change. But this statistical method does not fare too well either. Both 1860 and 1896 were emphatically high-turnout years, but 1932 was not. More Americans voted in the Roosevelt-Willkie contest of 1940 than in 1932, and no one ever suggests that the election of 1940 was a watershed event.

Similarly inconvenient facts spoil two other interesting hypotheses: that the mark of realignment could be unusual turmoil in the nominating process, or else the presence of third parties as major players on the scene. Those are pretty good descriptions of both 1860 and 1896, but they do not work at all for 1932, when Roosevelt was nominated without any significant opposition or controversy, and when third parties were a less significant factor than in most of the elections of the twentieth century. If third parties or convention fighting are necessary precursors to realignment, then 1932 does not qualify as a realigning year. And since 1932 is virtually everyone's realignment model, this form of speculation would appear to yield nothing but a dead end.

It could be, Mayhew conjectures, that

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all of these approaches are too rigid. Perhaps electoral realignment might be better understood through the more flexible techniques of narrative history, techniques that capture the social tensions and stresses that precede any long-lasting upheaval in the political system. Few would doubt the ability of any competent historian to show that the Civil War and the Great Depression were sufficient breeding grounds for electoral realignment, whatever the data-crunching might appear to suggest. And similarly dramatic stories can be told about 1896, and have been told by historians as different as Richard Hofstadter, C. Vann Woodward, and Laurence Goodwyn. The massive unemployment of the ongoing industrial depression, the trauma of the Pullman railroad strike, the rise of Populist enthusiasm, and the drama of Bryan's Cross of Gold speech to the Democratic convention: all of this is certainly the stuff of which realignment scenarios are made.

The difficulty, Mayhew observes, is that equally compelling stories can be created around other dates and other situations as well. 1896 was a year of stress and unsettling societal change, but so were 1876 and 1912. And both those elections yielded far more policy innovation on the part of the federal government—the end of Reconstruction in the first instance, the enactment of Wilson's Progressive economic agenda in the second—than 1896 did. But nobody ever nominates 1876 or 1912 as an example of critical elections and long-term realignment.

WHY NOT? TO Mayhew the answer is obvious: nobody looks for realignment in 1876 or 1912 because those years are inconvenient to the cyclical theory. For the cosmology to work, something profound has to be seen operating in the last decade of the nineteenth century—and so the attempt to discover such a transformation has driven an entire subspecialty of political science for decades. In Mayhew's view, realignment theorists are a little like Marxists or Freudians. They start with the theory and then look for the facts to support it, so it is no surprise that they manage to find them. And as Herbert Marcuse used to instruct, if the facts don't fit the theory, so much the worse for the facts.

If Mayhew is correct and American politics really does not run in generational cycles, then how does it work? In his final chapter, he comes close to forswearing any systematic attempt to explain electoral history. "Electoral politics," he writes, "is to an important degree just one thing after another.... Elections and their underlying causes are not usefully sortable into generation-long spans.... It is a Rip Van Winkle view of democracy that voters come awake only once in a generation.... It is too slippery, too binary, too apocalyptic, and it has come to be too much of a dead end." In pursuing this argument with remarkable diligence and precision, Mayhew may succeed admirably in wounding the Grand Theory severely among some of its long-standing adherents.

Still, Mayhew is unlikely to disabuse candidates, columnists, consultants, or any other political analysts of the notion that some larger patterns of history are embedded in the election returns every four years. This is in part because the periodization of history is not a habit limited to political scientists or to the study of elections; it is the way nearly all of us try to make sense of the past. Any rational person who thinks about the events of the twentieth century knows that there is no logic to dividing those events into rigid decade-long chunks—the Roaring Twenties, the Complacent Fifties, the Subversive Sixties—or slapping blanket labels onto whole generations of Americans: the Greatest Generation, the boomers, Gen X. Cultural history, like electoral history, is far messier than these categories and clichés. And yet all of us, including the most sophisticated and sensible of historians, continue to talk and to think as if this were the way historical forces really operate. It is far more convenient and intellectually satisfying than starting from the premise that elections or cultural fashions or generational attitudes are just "one thing after another."

I would guess, for example, that most of us who were young in 1968 believed then, and still believe now, that the election that year was a genuine turning point in American politics, a moment of turbulence in which large and irreconcilable forces fought over the direction of the Republic, with fateful consequences riding on the result. The source of this persistent belief cannot be traced in the election returns from that fall, or in the turnout, or in any particular law or policy that flowed from Nixon's victory over Humphrey. The source lies in memories about what 1968 felt like, in the emotion and the intensity and the bitterness that suffused every development in the campaign that year, and has not re-appeared in any election year since. Even conservatives who came to oppose much or all of the political and cultural legacy of the 1960s share the sense that 1968 was one of the hinges of modern American history, albeit for worse, not for better.

I have no quarrel with Mayhew's argument that historical generalities of this sort are based more on illusion than on demonstrable reality. But if so, it is an illusion that no sequence of arguments, no matter how carefully laid out, is likely to dispel. I suppose that finally the attitude of most observers toward political realignment is bound to be a little like Justice Stewart's attitude toward pornography: I know it when I see it. I have to confess that that is my crude and unempirical belief as well. ■

CORRESPONDENCE

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tion, "When am I no longer as good as I should be?" Toward the end of the article, though, Mukherjee asks us to accept "teams" as at least an interim solution to long-needed work-hour restrictions.

Mukherjee's perspective is that of a physician training mostly in hospital medicine. Because the preponderance of residents' salaries are paid by Medicare via hospitals, physicians-in-training have less outpatient and preventive-medicine experience than their subsequent practices will demand. My practice is virtually entirely in the outpatient arena, and, in that setting, the most important team member is the patient. One of the best pediatricians I know once remarked, "I don't believe in team pediatrics." He was saying that he wanted the team to be the two people most interested in the outcome—the physician and the patient. When we are ready to shift our focus from medicine as a hierarchical discipline governed by disinterested payers to one where there is a true partnership between physician and patient, the power relationship will change dramatically—and Derek the neurosurgeon can finally get some sleep.

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The editors welcome correspondence from readers. Please address letters to Correspondence, TNR, 1331 H Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20005 (letters may also be sent electronically to tnr@aol.com). All letters should include the writer's full name, address, and telephone number; be typed double-spaced; and be fewer than 200 words. Letters may be edited for space and clarity. Please do not send letters via fax.

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HARARE DIARIST

Stranded

MY BAD DAY IN ZIMbabwe, like so many bad days in Zimbabwe, began with a wait. This used to be a relatively normal country where people exchanged goods and services in relatively normal ways. Then President Robert Mugabe began trying to exert absolute power over the economy, and things got surreal. For example, Mugabe set absurdly low prices for 400-gram packages of cheddar cheese; so grocers started selling 200-gram hunks of cheddar at much higher prices. Similarly, bakers started selling "raisin bread" (with a few raisins) or "twisted bread" (with a few twists) to evade strict controls on normal bread prices. Mugabe's response has been to hire inspectors to arrest "profiteers" and enforce his because-I-said-so prices. So now there are drastic shortages and huge lines for staples. The joke here is that Zimbabweans have developed the highest IQs in the world: I queue for bread, I queue for sugar, I queue for gas.

I HAPPENED TO BE WAITING FOR A Jeep. The driver finally arrived, two hours late, and charged twice the price we had agreed on the night before, but I wasn't going to complain about 40,000 Zim dollars for a day. Sure, according to Mugabe's official exchange rate, that works out to $700. But it's only about $25 in the real world. The fixed official exchange rate is as twisted as the bread; even the government-sanctioned exchange bureaus used to offer the free-falling black-market rates until Mugabe shut them all down. With insolence rarely tolerated around here, Zimbabwe's currency has continued to ignore the president's dictates and depreciate in value. The 500-Zim notes are now known as Ferraris—because they go so fast. One Brit told me she calls them "bifocals." Because they "buy fuck all."

SO I HANDED OVER A SMALL MOUNtain of Ferraris and climbed into the Jeep with Tonderai Ndira, a laid-back young activist with the Movement for Democratic Change, the opposition party from which Mugabe stole last year's presidential election. "Tonda" was going to take me to Makonde, a few hours northwest of Harare, to show me how Mugabe's ZANU-PF party was using food as a political weapon. We were about to drive away when I noticed that our gas tank was only a quarter full. We might as well have driven away without tires. (But I'm getting ahead of my story.) With Mugabe running out of foreign currency, Zimbabwe is literally running out of gas. Drivers here routinely wait on eight-hour lines from mere rumors of fuel. Mugabe's latest solution is to confiscate the foreign currency earned by Zimbabwean manufacturers and exporters, who, unfortunately, no longer have much incentive to manufacture or export.

IT TOOK ANOTHER HOUR TO TRACK down a vehicle with a full tank, but finally a guy named Moses showed up in a clunker of a four-by-four to drive us to the promised land. We should've known he was bad news when he told us that he had been an election observer last year and that reports of ZANU-PF's voter fraud and intimidation were wildly exaggerated. (Actually, we should've known Moses was bad news when he explained that September 11, 2001, was the result of "prophecy.") We drove for an hour up a paved road, past fertile farmland that used to form part of southern Africa's breadbasket. Now much of the land is lying fallow because Mugabe seized it from white farmers and then gave much of it to ZANU-PF cronies with no agricultural experience. The World Food Program is now scrambling to distribute emergency aid to more than half of the country's twelve million residents. We started to see these hungry people in their mud-hut villages after we turned up a bumpy dirt road toward Makonde—until 90 minutes later, when we heard a pop and a hiss. "Puncture," Moses explained without apology. "No spare."

MOSES HITCHED A RIDE ON THE NEXT passing truck to Chinhoyi, a city on the way back to Harare, to hunt for a tire. Tonda and I were left stranded in rural Zimbabwe. We found a village a half-mile up the road, so we got to see the country's misery up close. There were none of the dying babies with distended bellies that signify African famine on CNN, but most of the kids were way too small for their age, and hardly any of them went to school. Most spent their days panning for gold in a nearby river—notwithstanding Mugabe's recent ban on "unauthorized alluvial gold-mining." So did many of the adults because the drought has wiped out their crops. And, since this village was an opposition stronghold, no one was bringing in food from the outside; Mugabe maintains a strict monopoly on grain imports, which he uses to reward supporters and punish dissenters. "We have no food," said an old woman named Mayi Banda, who lives with ten relatives in a thatched hut about the size of an on-deck circle. "Please help us."

HOURS PASSED. MOSES HAD DITCHED us. The sun was setting. I envisioned a night snuggled up in Mrs. Banda's hut. Finally, we managed to flag down a raggedy pickup truck. We squeezed onto the flatbed—already occupied by a dozen of our closest friends—and it bounced us back toward Chinhoyi. Until it stopped bouncing. "Stalled," the driver explained. "Sorry." I appreciated the apology.

LUCKILY, BY THIS TIME WE WERE LESS than a mile from the paved road. By now it was dark—except for huge lightning bolts that pierced the blackness. We walked to the road, hitched a ride with another pickup, and enjoyed an uneventful seven or eight seconds before: *Bam*! Something big and black smashed into the windshield right in front of my face leaving an ugly dent. I hadn't thought our new driver spoke English, but he turned to me with a grin and helpfully explained: "Bat."

BAT-MAN LEFT US IN CHINHOYI, A ZANU-PF stronghold where Tonda has tallied two of his 14 arrests. He also has been beaten up five times by Mugabe's youth brigade, a bunch of thugs known as the Green Bombers for their janitor-style uniforms. So he whisked me through back alleys to a nondescript intersection where a crowd of people was waiting for something. The national pastime, I guess. Then an 18-wheeler pulled up, the crowd surged, I nearly broke my hand climbing into the cab, and once again I found myself sharing close and uncomfortable quarters with a dozen new friends. Including a large woman who was sitting on my feet and a young man sprawled out across the dashboard. (I have pictures.)

OUR FIRST HALF-HOUR IN VEHICLE number 5 was uneventful enough, but then we reached a police roadblock where ZANU-PF officers armed with AK-47s—oh, never mind. The thing is, we made it back safely to Harare by midnight. I finished my reporting and left the country a few days later. And this is the inescapable point of any story about being stranded in Zimbabwe: Twelve million people are still stranded there.

MICHAEL GRUNWALD

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Time to Reform Head Start

Diane Ravitch is a research professor, New York University; distinguished visiting fellow, Hoover Institution; and member, Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education.

When I was a young parent, I read to my children every day. When walking in the neighborhood, we read shop signs. They quickly learned letters and new words and were good readers by the time they started school. The children of parents who read with them regularly begin school with larger vocabularies than those children whose parents do not have the time or education to introduce them to literacy.

The Head Start program was created in 1964 to give poor children the same kinds of educational opportunities that their more-advantaged peers get informally at home. Unfortunately, over the years, the program has abandoned its focus on education in favor of an array of social services, including nutrition education, and counseling. **After nearly forty years and many billions of dollars, Head Start children still begin kindergarten far behind children from middle-class homes on measures of school readiness.**

Most Head Start teachers do not have a college degree and are poorly paid. A large proportion of them are parents of Head Start students. As if to echo the program's isolation from educational goals, it is located in the Department of Health and Human Services, not in the Department of Education.

The last evaluation of the program, conducted in 1998, found that the typical entering student could not identify a single letter of the alphabet. At the end of a year, the same child could identify only one or two letters and had learned only eleven new words. Head Start children were not learning these skills because their teachers were not teaching them.

Head Start has no standard curriculum for school readiness, and the centers receive no guidance about which skills and knowledge to teach. Instead, Head Start prides itself on its extreme decentralization, regardless of its lack of success in preparing children for school experiences.

The Bush administration is trying to change this situation by proposing that Head Start teachers be trained in literacy techniques. Remarkably, leaders of many Head Start centers are opposed to the new emphasis on literacy. Some are even refusing to participate in literacy training.

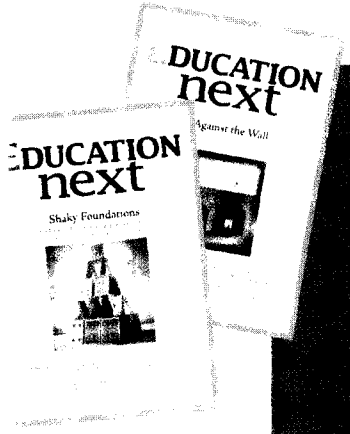
Head Start will never fulfill its original promise until the program recognizes its responsibility to give disadvantaged children what advantaged children receive every day: immersion in reading, an enlarged vocabulary, and the joy of learning. Head Start cannot close the cognitive gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged children until it has better-educated teachers, better-paid teachers, and a determination to prepare its nearly one million students for school.

Successful preschools have long demonstrated that learning need not be drudgery. Young children can be taught letters, words, stories, and games in a happy and creative manner. They can sing, dance, paint, and play while gaining new vocabulary and learning to express their ideas.

If our society is serious about reducing the educational gaps that divide children of different races and classes, we must meet the challenge of redesigning an effective Head Start program.

— *Diane Ravitch*

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.



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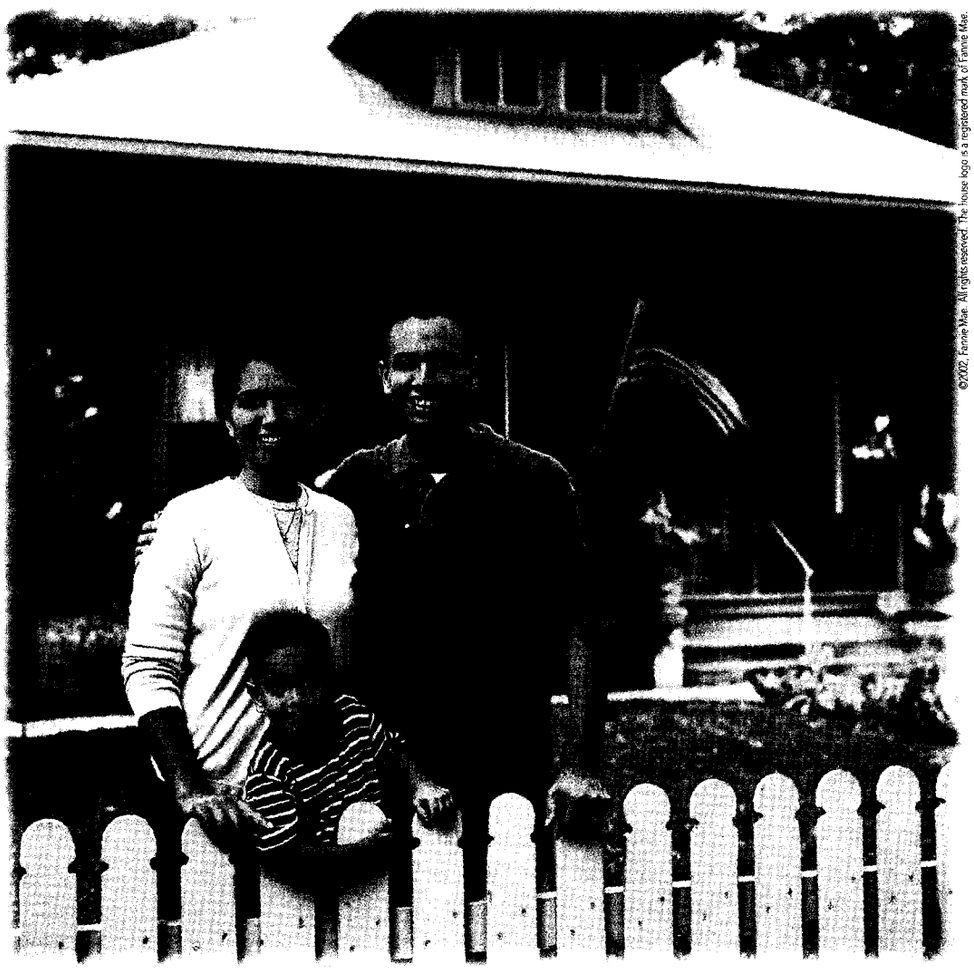

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